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SERMONS

ON THE

MOST INTERESTING SUBJECTS

OF THE

CHRISTIAN RELIGION,

BY THE

Rev. H. SMITH, D. D.

READER OF THE TEMPLE,

LECTURER OF ST. MARGARET'S, WESTMINSTER,

AND

CHAPLAIN

TO THE

Most Noble the Marquis of Downshire.

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SERMON I.

BEING AN

ENQUIRY INTO THE DIVINE ORIGINAL

OF THE

HOLY SCRIPTURES.

GALATIONS i. 11, 12.

But I certify you, Brethren, that the Gospel which was preached of me, is not after Man: For I neither received it of Man, neither was I taught it, but by the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

IN order to know what it was that induced St. Paul to write in this manner to the Galatians, we must have recourse to the context, which begins thus:—"*Paul an Apostle, (not of man, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead) and all the brethren which are with me, unto the Churches of Galatia: grace be to you, and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father: to whom be glory for ever and ever, amen. I marvel, that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ, unto another gospel;*" *i e.* it astonishes me greatly to find that you have so soon deserted me, who called you to the glorious gospel of Christ, wherein the means of salvation and happiness are offered you, and so precipitately betake yourselves to, what you apprehend to be, another gospel; which is not another; but

there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. It is not another gospel, for there can be no gospel but that which was revealed from heaven; therefore, I entreat you, not to give any heed to them that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. This he repeats again in the verse following, and then says, "*for do I persuade men, or God?*"

Do I endeavour to gain the applause of men, by preaching such doctrines as are pleasing to carnal minds, or do I preach the doctrines of God? Judge ye. Or *do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.* If I continued to please men, as I did formerly, by being a strict pharisee, how then can I be a servant of Christ. *But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me, is not after man, for I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

By all which it evidently appears, that even so early as the apostolic age, there were some who endeavoured to pervert the word of God, and had debauched the minds of many of the Galatians How careful then should we be, in these days, to examine the doctrines of those, of whom we have the least distrust, and not suffer ourselves to be imposed upon by ignorant or designing men!

From the words of my text, I shall endeavour to prove, that the holy scriptures are the re-

vealed word of God. In order to which, I shall

First, shew that the testimony we have in their favour, is a sufficient evidence of their divinity.

And secondly, That their own intrinsic excellence is a confirmation of it.

Then I shall conclude with such inferences, as the subject naturally suggests.

First, I am to shew that the testimony we have, in favour of the holy scriptures, is a sufficient evidence of their divinity.

But before I begin upon the subject, I think it necessary to premise, that though both the old and new Testament are the word of God, and both written by inspired men, as were Moses and the Prophets, and the four Evangelists; yet I shall confine myself more particularly to the gospel of the blessed Jesus: because one being proved, necessarily proves the other.

Now our natural reason dictates to us, that there is a God, who must be a Being of infinite perfection, all-wise, all-powerful, and all-good; and that the world was made by him: for we are sensible that no man could bring himself, and such wonderful appearances of nature, into existence. And that this wise Being must be free from all impurity and imperfection, and of course, must be a pure spirit, without any bodily parts or passions. For the body is liable to corruption, and therefore imperfect; and the passions of human nature are plain indications of our wants and imperfections; and therefore cannot, with any pro-

priety, be attributed to God, who, as I said before, is all-perfect.

These we must suppose the dictates of reason, without any regard to revelation; because to pretend to prove the being and attributes of God from scripture, before we have proved the authority of scripture, is arguing upon a bad foundation, which will not bear such arguments to be built upon it. These then, being the principles of reason, the mind of man can go no further, without a divine revelation; and without a revelation we must be utterly ignorant of the mind and will of God: therefore, in many cases, must be doubtful of what is proper to be done, and very uncertain of the truth.

It appears therefore, from the idea we have of the goodness of God, that it must be consistent with his other attributes to make a full discovery of his will, for the improvement of our understandings, and the regulation of our faith and practice: thus far reason carries us.

To the mind thus fairly disposed by reason, human tradition brings in its evidence, and delares, that *God at sundry times, and in divers manners, did speak in times of old, by his prophets,* to the Jews in particular; and in latter days, both to Jew and Gentile, by his son Jesus Christ. And also assures us, that the scriptures were received by the Jews in part, and by Christians in the whole; *i.e.* what we commonly call the old Testament, was received by the Jews; and that which goes under the name of

the new Testament, together with the old Testament, was always received by Christians as the revealed word of God.

To this we may add the testimony of the holy Spirit.

There are many things in these sacred writings foretold, which history assures us, are long since accomplished; many prophecies in the old Testament were fulfilled long before the gospel was revealed to us; many predictions were verified by the gospel, and many things foreshewn in the gospel, have since come to pass: and some more, it is still expected by the faithful, will be fully accomplished in due time.

But, says the deist, how am I to be assured of the truth of all this? It is a sufficient answer to him, that we have as great certainty of their truth, as we have of the truth of any other history. He might say, with as much propriety, he will not believe there were such persons as Oliver Cromwel, or Queen Elizabeth, because he fears he may be imposed upon. And, if he should say so, would you not think him destitute of common sense?* Why then should

* None can demonstrate to me, that there is such an island in America as Jamaica; yet, upon the testimony of credible persons, and authors who have written of it, I am as free from all doubt concerning it, as from doubting of the clearest mathematical demonstration. So that this is to be entertained as a firm principle, by all those who pretend to be certain of any thing at all, that when any thing is proved by as good arguments as that thing is capable of, and we have as great assurance that it is, as we could possibly have supposing it were, we ought not in reason to make any doubt of the existence of that thing. TILLOTSON.

we scruple to give our assent to the sacred writings, upon as good evidence as we have for the truth of any other history?

Indeed, we have a stronger evidence in their favour, than we have for the truth of any other writings; since it has not been in the power of any man, no not even their greatest enemies, from the day they were first published to this very day, to prove one single fact to be erroneous or false: and we have profane history to testify, that those memorable events which are recorded in the sacred scriptures, did not happen in a corner, but were well known to all the world. This is what I mean by the testimony of the holy Spirit; as none but an all-seeing God can declare future events. I come now as was proposed, in the

Second place, to shew that the scriptures, by their own intrinsic excellence, confirm their divinity.

As there never has been any body of laws so admirably contrived to enforce virtue, and discountenance vice, as those contained in the gospel, it is reasonable to conclude that they are undoubtedly a true revelation of the will of God, and are the result of infinite knowledge, and profound wisdom. This will appear more clear, when we take a particular and distinct survey of them.

Thus the doctrines are so pure, so sublime, and spiritual, as plainly to demonstrate, that no human creature could ever reveal them; so mysterious, so perfectly holy, that we must be convinced they never could be the

product of the fallible understanding of a mere man; they are so profound, that the angels of heaven earnestly pry, and desire to look into them.

What a wonderful mystery is the ever blessed Trinity; the unspotted conception and incarnation of the blessed Jesus; his humbling himself to stoop to the infirmities of human nature; his meritorious passion, suffering, and death upon the cross for lost sinners; his glorious resurrection from the dead, and triumphant ascension into heaven; his future coming to judge the world, when all nations shall be summoned before him to answer for their actions, and receive their just reward! For *God hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness.* Acts xvii. 31.

These are things greatly out of the reach of human reason to conceive; and their truth cannot be destroyed by the malice of the devil, their greatest enemy.

Again; When we examine the practical part of the gospel, and find what precepts it propounds for the government of our lives and actions, we must be more fully convinced of its divinity; because every precept in it tends to rectify the errors of mankind, and promote their happiness. And is not this worthy of the Divine Being?

The lawgivers of Greece and Rome never laid down any systym of laws equal to those in the new Testament; not even Moses himself

among the Jews. For though the precepts of the Gospel have their foundation in the moral law, or ten commandments, yet they add greater light and dignity to it; they improve morality to a much higher pitch than ever it was taught in any of the academies of Greece, or synagogues of the Jews. It restrains our most inward thoughts, as well as our outward actions.

Solon nor Lycurgus, the lawgivers of Greece; Numa, of Rome; even Moses among the Jews, never taught their disciples that heart-revenge was murder; that a wanton glance was adultery, and that a man might be criminal in his heart without proceeding to the outward act.

But in the gospel, we learn better things. There is not a precept in it but commands virtue, or forbids vice, even in the least degree imaginable. This will appear very plain to those who make the holy scripture their study; and not only so, but when read with an honest and good heart, it will produce its good effects on their minds and practice.

To conclude this particular, had we not the evidence of miracles to confirm its divinity, yet such is the exalted tendency of its precepts, that that alone is sufficient to convince us, that it came from an infinitely wise and good Being.

Again; If we look into the nature of the rewards and punishments mentioned in scripture, we shall find that they are the most

suitable, the most powerful inducements to a rational creature, diligently to practise the duties it commands, and avoid those vices it forbids.

The all-wise and supreme God, who perfectly understands the nature and disposition of his creatures, has suited his sanctions the more effectually to work upon the prevailing passions of our nature, the hopes of a most glorious reward, or the fears of an eternity of punishment.

What can be conceived more enticing and desirable, or more conducive to engage us to the practice of virtue, than the hopes and assurance of a blessed reward in the regions of the blessed? And what can be a more effectual motive to deter us from sin than the fear and certainty of future punishment with the devil and his angels?

If any thing can allay the heats and disorders of a distempered soul, it must be the comfortable reliance upon the promises of God in Christ Jesus; and the want of these was the great defect of all religions, 'till the revelation of the gospel of Christ: therefore St. Paul may well certify us, in the words of the text, that *the gospel which he preached was not after man, for he neither received it of man, neither was he taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

For let any man consider the state of the heathen world. Could they, by the dim light of nature, attain to the knowledge of a future state, and the rewards and punishments consequent upon it? No they could not. 'Tis true the more knowing sort of them did think that their

and that they should de-
a place where they should
ends and relations; but all
never give them the least
hope for so great a reward as
unds; because the services the
perform are not adequate to so

Plato, and their disciples, talked
a state of future happiness: but
what a small number there was of these
compared with those who believed
all of the matter. And what strength
arguments carry with them? They
weak, and very insufficient to reclaim
grown old in vice and wickedness.

further, and look into the state of man-
under the dispensation of Moses, does it
appear much more perfect? Very little: for
though the Jews had several valuable precepts,
yet they were enforced by no express promises
of eternal life, nor threatenings of eternal mi-
sery; nor did they know any thing of a life to
come, but by the obscure intimations or tradi-
tions of their inspired men. And that this was
really the case, is evident from the sect of Sa-
duces, which was very numerous among the
Jews, who denied that there was either resurrec-
tion, angel, or spirit: and the question which
they put to our Saviour touching the resurrec-
tion, plainly confirms it. But, blessed be God,
the matter is now put beyond all doubt, by the
appearance of our Redeemer, *who hath brought
life and immortality to light through the gospel.*

All this considered, have we not the greatest encouragement imaginable, to live as becomes the gospel of Christ, in all soberness and honesty? What shall we say for ourselves if we neglect so great salvation? Is eternal punishment then too much for us? Too much for a sinner who will seek his own destruction in spite of all the warnings of the gospel? No, if he perish, it is no more than his desert. And he will be more inexcuseable than a Jew, or a Turk, if he continues in his sins, after all these glorious discoveries of the gospel.

If he is not bettered by these means of grace, what can he expect but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation? He has nothing to plead in his excuse, because his duty is plain. There are set before him life and immortality, as the reward of virtue; and death and hell, as the consequence of vice. His will is free, so that it is in his power to chuse which he thinks most desirable; and though the devil is his powerful enemy, yet his Redeemer's grace is sufficient for him; therefore if he fail of everlasting happiness, the fault is in himself.

Again; Rules of practice are always the most excellent, when delivered in a style the most plain and simple. By this means they will be universally understood, and become a public benefit. No writings, then, are so worthy of that character as the holy scriptures, wherein every precept is suitable to the capacity of the most ignorant.

In human writings, even the most correct of them, you will find a great deal of vain and

unprofitable argumentation, which, when compared with the scriptures, is like holding a candle to the sun.

But in this divine book of knowledge, every page glows with purity and excellence; every chapter, every verse, produces something pleasing and instructive to a pious mind!

It may be objected, that there are many passages in the Bible hard to be understood, and not within the compass of an ordinary capacity. To this I say, that though there are passages in scripture obscure, and not quite so intelligible to some, yet they are such as no way disturb the truth; but are historical, or relate only to some rules of practice peculiar to the times in which they were transacted. But the practical parts of our duty, as delivered in these sacred records, are very clear to the lowest understanding.

The terms of salvation are too clear to any man to form an excuse for the neglect of his duty, either to God, his neighbour, or himself. He can easily understand the meaning of such scriptures as these. "*This is a true saying, and worthy to be received, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord.*" These are so self-evident, that nothing but wilful and downright obstinacy can hinder him from knowing what they mean. And they are such as these which make up the whole substance of the gospel. We may therefore conclude with St. Paul, "*If our gospel be hid, it is hid to those that are lost, in whom the God of this world hath blinded the eyes of them*

that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should shine unto them.

Again, we find every truth in the gospel enforced with the greatest authority and affection; with a just mixture of severity and condescension, so as the more effectually to work upon the mind of a reasonable creature.

A vicious man, that hardens himself in wickedness, is there threatened with eternal punishment in a lake of fire and brimstone, which burns for ever and ever. "*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.*" Rom. i, 18. "*Who shall be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.*" Mark ix. 45—6.

But a man that is good, who does justly, loves mercy, and walks humbly with his God, is comforted by the glorious promises of living with God, and just men made perfect, to endless ages. "*Those that are alive,*" says the apostle, "*and remain, shall be caught up together with them into the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*"

Again, what tenderness and compassion are in these words: "*Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden: take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thee as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but thou wouldest not!*" And, "*Oh that thou hadst known the things which belong to thy peace!*" Such tender

and majestic expressions at once soothe and move the passions, and strike conviction into the soul.

From what has been said, we may rest assured that *the gospel is not after man, for St. Paul neither received it of man, neither was he taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

The inferences that I shall draw from this discourse are, that since the gospel evidently appears to be the inspired word of God, and as the terms of salvation and happiness are there revealed, it highly becomes those who value their greatest interest to regulate their lives and actions according to its precepts.

Let no man then say his faith only shall save him. He must not think a bare belief of the truths of the gospel, without practical holiness, will bring him to heaven; for, however he may deceive himself, "*God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.*" His faith, without it be lively and operative, will profit him nothing. If he will credit scripture, he will find that St Peter tells him, that a man is *justified by works, and not by faith only*, implying, that it is such a faith as makes a man fruitful in good works, in his life and conversation, and not a bare leaning upon Christ for salvation, whether we are wicked or virtuous.

A man may talk plausibly about religion, and tell you he believes that Christ will save him, and, at the same time, be a wicked pharisee. But his life and manners must be answerable to his faith, or else his nice arguings and subtle reasonings about religion will profit him nothing.

It was not the design of the gospel to make men Christians in name, but Christians in deed and truth: to teach them to get victorious over their corrupt inclinations, and to subdue the flesh to the spirit. Wherefore, my brethren, "*Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*" And let us put a due esteem and value upon the scriptures, as being verily persuaded that they are the word of God. Let us read them with seriousness and consideration, and talk of them with reverence and simplicity; and not, as is too much the case, make them the subject of ridicule. The contempt they meet with from libertines and idle people, and the scandalous liberty that many Christians (if they can be called such) have taken in perverting them to the most wicked purposes, is too well known.

Every intelligent person will easily discover the fatal consequences of the abuse of scripture: for when a man begins to lessen his esteem for them, he will not read them with that seriousness and attention which is requisite, in order to induce him to follow the rules they prescribe: and when once he makes them the standard of wit and humour, they will soon cease to be the rule of his life and actions.

But, my brethren, I am persuaded better things of you. I know you believe the gospel, and will rest satisfied with the assurance St. Paul has given you, that he received it by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

SERMON II.

WHEREIN

THE DOCTRINE OF FAITH

IS

CLEARLY STATED.

SERMON II.

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CLEARLY STATED.

MARK, xi. 22.

Have Faith in GOD.

FAITH is undoubtedly the essence of Christianity. It is therefore highly reasonable that we should endeavour to get a true notion of it; and the more so, as it has been misrepresented, not only by weak Christians, but by ignorant and designing men.

Malicious libertines despise it, and make it the subject of ridicule. Weak Christians mistake it, and represent it in a very false and absurd light.

Thus faith, which is the principal support and foundation of religion, suffers as much by its injudicious friends as it does by its malignant enemies. The weak Christian gives himself up to a blind credulity without reason or consideration, and is therefore justly termed an enthusiast. The malicious libertine, by an obstinate and capricious humour, denies every thing that wants the evidence of sense to support it; and therefore is very justly styled a

sceptic. Now, in order that we may arrive to a true notion of faith, I shall make it the business of this discourse,

First, To shew what it is that we, as Christians, are bound to believe.

Secondly, I shall point out wherein this doctrine of faith is misunderstood by the friends and by the enemies of christianity.

Lastly, I shall conclude with some inferences suitable to the subject.

First, then, I am to shew what it is that we as Christians, are bound to believe.

In order to this, I shall take notice of several very remarkable instances of faith, recorded in scripture, for our instruction.—The 11th chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews treats entirely of faith. It begins with telling us, that "*Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*"

Now it is very evident, that the things hoped for by the patriarchs were the rewards that God had promised to the upright, as we shall see very plain when we read this chapter, which is as follows. "*By faith Abraham when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive as an inheritance, obeyed.*" "*Through faith also Sarah had a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.*" "*By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.*"—"*By faith Jacob when he was a dying blessed both the sons of Joseph.*" "*By faith Joseph when he died, made mention of the departing of the*

children of Israel;" *i. e.* he believed God that he would, notwithstanding they were then in Egypt, bring them into the land of Canaan, as he had promised. "*By faith, Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; chose to suffer affliction, esteemed the reproach of Christ more than the treasures of Egypt.*" "*By faith the Israelites passed through the Red Sea.*" "*By faith the walls of Jericho fell down.*" "*By faith the harlot Rahab was saved.*" And many other instances we have of Gideon, Barak and Sampson; of David also, and Samuel, "*Who through faith subdued kingdoms, stopped the mouths of lions, turned armies to flight, endured cruel mockings and scourgings, and wandered about clad in skins of sheep and goats; of whom the world was not worthy, and for whom God had prepared a city.*" These are eminent instances of faith. And did not this faith consist in a trust in the promises of God? yes, they believed him faithful who had promised, and they were not disappointed.

When Abraham, as we read in the 12th chapter of Genesis, *left his country, and his kindred, and his father's house, to go into a land which the Lord had promised him,* what was it but that he believed and trusted in the promises of God? He believed that his gracious benefactor was able and would certainly give him the promised blessings.

"*Abraham believed in God, and it was accounted unto him for righteousness;*" not because he believed there was a God, but because when God had promised him a son in his old

age, he believed that he could and would give him the blessing which he had promised: and upon this account righteousness was imputed to him.

When Moses despised the honours and treasures of Egypt, what was it for? He did not despise them because it was a poor honour to govern a parcel of slaves; no, but he had respect unto the recompence of reward. He had his eye upon the promised blessings; and this, without any earthly assistance, made him forsake Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king. Through faith, therefore, he endured as seeing him who is invisible. He saw the arm of God, by faith, stretched out for his deliverance, and that encouraged him to encounter the many difficulties and objections which he made when he received his commission.

In short, when Gideon, and Barak, and the rest of the judges of Israel; and Saul, and David, and the other kings of Israel; I say, whenever they went forth against their enemies, under a promise from God that he would deliver them into their hands, they trusted in the promises of God, and therefore were always victorious.

From all these remarkable instances of faith, it evidently appears that a true faith consists in a firm belief of the promises of God, a sure persuasion and steady confidence that God can, and certainly will, perform what he promises.

But this is not all that a Christian is bound to believe. A Christian must believe the doctrines of the gospel relative to Jesus Christ, the author and finisher of our faith. And they are, that Christ is the only begotten son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds; came into the world to save sinners; suffered death upon the cross, so as to die no more; ascended (in the presence of many) into heaven, and there sits at the right hand of God, where he now reigns and intercedes for his faithful followers, and will continue to do so to the end of the world: that he will come in glory to judge the quick and the dead, and will reward them according to their deeds here on earth; will doom the wicked to hell, where they shall, for ever, undergo the most inconceivable torments; and will welcome the righteous into heaven, where they shall enjoy an uninterrupted duration of endless felicity and glory: and to sum up all, he must believe that the miracles of Christ, and the doctrines of the apostles, proceed from the power of the holy Spirit of God.

But the blessings annexed to faith do not proceed only from a bare persuasion of the existence of God, or the incarnation and sufferings of Jesus Christ; but from a firm and steady confidence that God can, and will surely perform what he promises. It was this that placed the apostles on so many thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel; they had in view those glorious rewards promised

by their Lord and Master to those who should endure to the end. This made them outbrave every difficulty, and suffer persecution with chearfulness and courage; they suffered hunger and thirst, cold and nakedness, bonds, and even death itself; they were not only ready to be bound but to die for the Lord Jesus.

These men, surely, were not so mad as to undergo all these sufferings for the sake of suffering! They could not be so fool-hardy as to encounter the united malice of the Jews and Gentiles, only because they believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the son of God! No, they trusted in his promises, they believed him powerful to bestow on them infinite rewards, and faithful to perform his promises.

From all which it evidently appears, that it is not only believing the doctrines of the gospel, and that Christ and his apostles acted and wrote by the power and spirit of God, but it is also a firm belief, that God can and will, most surely, perform his promises: and that is the true faith upon which the blessings of another life are founded. I come now,

Secondly, To point out wherein this doctrine of faith is misunderstood by the friends and by the enemies of Christianity.

Those who think themselves friends to the gospel of Christ, (though in reality they are not) think that the bare persuasion that *Christ is the lamb of God, that taketh away the*

sins of the world, and through faith in his blood they will receive remission of their sins, and enjoy every other benefit of his passion: and on this belief only they hope for salvation.

But this is a very dangerous mistake, propagated by too many of those who would pass for the only true gospel preachers; and indeed they do so by many ignorant and illiterate people, who give themselves up to a blind credulity, and suffer themselves to be led away from the established church by every one who pretends to a more than ordinary share of the holy Spirit.

This mistaken notion of faith, I say, is extremely dangerous, because it disserves the great end of the gospel; which is to bring every sinner to repentance, and to make him love God with sincerity, and his neighbour as himself.

And how can he love God with sincerity, if he lives in an habitual violation of his laws? How can he love his neighbour as himself, if he do not shew him all possible acts of kindness? And yet this kind of faith, which I am speaking of, will admit of his neglect of these things, and at the same time he may rest assured of salvation. A most fatal mistake! that leads men to be remiss in the most valuable of Christian duties! and casts a vile odium upon our most holy religion! If this is a true faith, let us revert the disciple's question to our Saviour, and ask who then can be damned? I protest I know not. For in this case, the hypocrite,

the libertine, the cheat, the murderer, the sensualist, and in a word, the vilest sinner that we can think of, is at liberty to follow his vicious inclinations here, and yet, by only believing that Christ died for his sins, escape the curses of the law, and possess a state of happiness hereafter!

Now, my brethren, what do you think of such a faith as this? Can there be any thing more grateful to flesh and blood than it is? Nothing can; it will suit any one; and we shall find few without it.

But then it may be objected, what does St. Paul mean, when he talks so much of being justified by faith, if it is not a belief in the merits of Christ for salvation, without any works of our own? Though St. Paul tells us we are justified by faith only, yet it is not this mistaken faith; it is a faith that works by love. A man is justified by faith, and faith is justified by works. And this is verified not only by our own reason, but by the testimony of St. Peter. "*What doth it profit my brethren,*" says he, "*though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him? If a brother or a sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, depart in peace, be ye warmed, and be ye filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.*" It is nothing more than a bare insignificant belief, and hath nothing to make it acceptable to God. "*Yea a man may say,*" says the Apostle,

"thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works."

So you see by these plain texts of scripture, that by works it is that faith is made perfect. And when St. Paul talks so much, in the 3d and 4th chapters of his Epistle to the Romans, about being justified by faith, it was in opposition to the works of the law of Moses.

Many of the Jews who were just converted to Christianity, though they believed that Jesus Christ was the son of God, yet they thought it was still necessary to circumcise and keep the ceremonial law. Upon which St. Paul, to convince them of their mistake, tells them that *by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified.* And though St. James says expressly that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only, he does not contradict St. Paul. He does not say a man is justified by the works of the ceremonial law, but by the works of humanity and Christian love; and this, not through any merit in the man, as though he deserved a reward for his good actions; because it is well known that no man can perform a perfect obedience to God's law, but it is by the free love of God that we are justified through the merits of Jesus Christ, who hath already made satisfaction to the divine Justice for our breach of his commandments.

It is clear then, that when St. Paul tells them they are justified by faith, it is not in opposition to such good works, as prayer to

God, acts of charity to our fellow creatures, and a sincere obedience to the precepts of the gospel.

No, it is by such a faith only as is productive of these good works; and yet we have nothing to boast of, because there is neither merit in our faith nor our works in the sight of God; by which I mean, they cannot merit heaven. But God has made our faith and good works the conditions of our salvation, not for any merit in either, but only through the merits of Jesus Christ: the merit is all in him.

This, to every serious mind, will appear to be a clear explication of the doctrine of faith. But how many do we meet with who adhere to the most extravagant doctrines of their own sect; and without any examination, receive what should be searched into with the utmost care and circumspection.

But, my brethren, should we not, before we believe a doctrine, examine whether it be possible or useful? whether it be consistent with reason and correspondent to truth? whether it is scriptural, and agreeable to piety and holiness? surely we should. For all those doctrines that will not stand the test of such an examination, we may be assured are the doctrines of men, and not of God; and those who propagate them are most justly to be looked upon as actuated by pride, ignorance, corruption, and destitution of the truth.

A good and conscientious man is startled at a faith pregnant with absurdities; and the

libertine treats it (as it deserves) with contempt and ridicule, and from thence concludes that the whole Christian religion is a scheme of error and delusion. And as the libertine is always ready to take every advantage given him by weak Christians against their religion, here, he thinks, is a fine opening for him. He would want no assistance to overturn such a doctrine of faith as this is, but imagines he can do it at once; having, as he supposes, a powerful battery of his own always in readiness to play against it.

What is this faith, says he? It is no part of a virtuous character; on the contrary, it is folly to believe a thing that is not evident to my senses; and when it is evident to my senses, I cannot withhold my assent. But as no man can see beyond his horizon, so neither can he believe beyond his reason.

This is too vague an argument too carry any force with it; for if faith depends upon irresistible evidence only, why do the scriptures all along promise so many blessings to it? Or, why are we said to be saved by faith, when, if we take it in this light, the greatest libertine is not without it?

To this the libertine may say, "I believe nothing of the scriptures, therefore have nothing to do with them. I have no opinion of mysteries, nature and reason shall be my guide; let others who chuse it go by the ignis fatuus of enthusiasm.

Well, we will argue with him from nature and reason. Nature instructs every one, who

has the least degree of reflection, that there is a God that created him, and has made him to know good from evil; and has also left him at liberty to chuse which he will: it must then naturally follow, that this God will reward or punish him accordingly. Without this persuasion, there could be no religion at all; and it must be the hope of recommending themselves to the favour of the supreme being that influences the conduct of such as walk by the light of nature.

And, pray now, what does Revelation require more than to believe that God is the rewarder of all them that diligently seek him? Does that which is an article of faith, under the light of nature, cease to be so because it becomes a branch of Revelation? Shall a man believe those things which nature suggests, and disbelieve them after they have been confirmed to him by the Author of nature? Monstrous partiality! and perverseness indeed!

Faith, says St. Paul, *is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.* What were the things hoped for before the publication of the gospel? Were they not the rewards that God would give to the upright? What are the things not seen under the gospel dispensation? Are they not the promised blessings of heaven, through Jesus Christ? Where then is the mystery that the libertine has no opinion of?

In short, faith is the eye of reason, which will direct such benighted mortals as walk by the light of nature to the regions of bliss and

immortality! It will influence their behaviour in this life, and will support them under the uncertainty of things hoped for.

But what a comfort must it be to a good Christian, that his faith is established upon a much surer foundation than it could possibly be under the light of nature! Then there was no certainty of such glorious rewards as we have now; they were only presumptive and hoped for, but now are ascertained by Jesus Christ, *who hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.* It must therefore be the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, that war against the Christian faith.

It does not relish with the carnal man to believe that Jesus is the son of God; that he took man's nature upon him for our redemption; that he proved his divinity by miracles and wonders; that he has made known the will of his Father, which is to reward the righteous with inconceiveable blessings, and punish the wicked with as inconceivable torments; these are such mortal stabs to sense and appetite, which are the enemies of faith, that it is not at all surprising to find so little of it amongst inconsiderate men. After arguing with the libertine from nature, let us see what reason dictates.

If we consult that, it will tell us, that such a faith as is founded upon demonstration, is not so valuable as that which is built upon probable evidence only. Because a faith resulting from the conviction of our senses, com-

mands our assent without the least hesitation or difficulty. Whereas that which proceeds from probable evidence, has many difficulties to encounter, many prejudices to get over; which can be done only by serious reflection, and impartial enquiry; and does, upon that account, require a more generous and honest disposition, than that which proceeds from sensible conviction.

If we value the authority of scripture, we may confirm this by what Thomas said concerning the resurrection of Christ. "*Except,*" says he, "*I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.*" But when our Saviour condescended to remove his caprice and obstinacy, he, in an ecstasy of joy, cries out, My Lord, and my God!

You see he made no difficulty to believe, when he was convinced by the evidence of his senses. But what said Christ? "*Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed:*" and in this rank of the blessed are all true believers at this day.

Now, if there be any difference between a man that makes use of his reason, and diligently examines the credibility of things, and one who gives himself up to a hazardous and implicit faith, without reason or consideration; certainly the one, as he acts like a rational creature, may be called a virtuous man, and deservedly rewarded; the other, as he gives up

his reason and debases himself below the brute creation, may be termed a vicious man, and deservedly punished.

Give me leave, now, to draw an inference or two, by way of conclusion.

And first, as this doctrine of faith is misunderstood, and represented in a false light by enemies and injudicious friends, we should be upon our guard, and take care that we are not deceived, but consult the scriptures alone for information

But if, after all, we should happen to be misled by those who put false glosses upon this doctrine, we must be careful on the one hand, that it proceeds from a defect in our understandings, and not from an inclination to this or that opinion; so, on the other side, we must renounce all scepticism, and where we find such evidence as would command our assent in a thing of less moment, than that of our salvation, we should pay the greatest defference and respect to it imaginable.

Indeed, when a man has been bred up in an erroneous opinion, and through prejudice of education, and inability to judge properly, steadily adheres to it, as being verily persuaded of its truth, he certainly deserves all the candour and charity that we are capable of giving.

But when, on the contrary, a man disregards religion and virtue, and lives an immoral and abandoned life; when he thinks it a matter of no consequence whether he does any good action or not; of no consequence whether he keeps holy the sabbath, or goes to any place of

public worship; but thinks a bare leaning upon Christ for salvation will save him. Or when he imagines he has nothing more to do but to come unto Christ just as he is; to carry nothing with him but his sins, in order that they may be washed away by the blood of the lamb; I say, when this is the case, we must pronounce him to be in a dangerous situation, or else allow that the gospel contradicts itself.

The language of scripture is, "*Repent and be baptized for the remission of sins*," which implies that we are not to come unto Christ by a bare belief in his merits only, but we must bring our repentance along with us. And our repentance must be sincere too, such as is proved by a reformation of life and manners. And, when we have done all, we must acknowledge ourselves unprofitable servants; that we have done that which was our duty to do, and not arrogate the least merit to ourselves; but allow all the merit to be in Christ.

Another inference is, that we take care to be of the number of those faithful whom Christ will take with him into glory, when he comes to judge the world. For as we must all appear, in the day of judgment, before a most awful tribunal, to answer for every action and most secret thought; and as we know not how soon we shall be called off this earthly stage, it must be of the greatest importance to us to be prepared for the coming of our blessed Master, by a true faith, productive of good works.

The faithful Christian, that "*staggers not at the promises of God through unbelief*," shall then

meet with a most glorious reward from a righteous Judge, who hath promised him a crown of life!

But the wicked sinner, who hath slighted the terms of salvation, and neglected the day of grace, shall be doomed to eternal misery.

Let the sinner then, whoever he is, consider this, and be wise before it be too late; let him lay aside his contempt of God and religion, and be assured that what St. Paul says is true—"*The just shall live by faith.*" Purify, therefore, your hearts by faith: have faith in God, and be persuaded, that what God hath promised he is faithful to perform; and this will lead you to renounce the world and its enjoyments; to set your affections upon things above; to endure the seeming hardships of virtue, for the unseen, though promised joys of heaven; and lead you at last to the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.

SERMON III.

IN WHICH THE

TRUE NATURE OF REPENTANCE

IS

CONSIDERED.

2 CORINTHIANS, vii. 9.

Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance.

IN order to find out the occasion of these words, we will look into the context, where we shall find that St. Paul (in the foregoing chapter) had wrote a very affectionate epistle to the Corinthians, wherein he informed them of the many sufferings he and his fellow labourers in the gospel underwent for the truth of what they had preached; and having exhorted them to purity of life, is informed by Titus, whom he meets at Macedonia, that it had so good an effect upon them, as to produce a godly sorrow in their minds, which led them to repentance.

Their godly sorrow led them to be more watchful and circumspect over their lives and actions; they examined themselves, were sorry for their evil doings, and their sorrow was godly, which produced a reformation.

And this will appear very plain to any one who reads this epistle, from whence my text is taken. At the 11th verse are these words: "*For behold, this self same thing that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things you have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.*

As if he had said, "It appears very evident, that your sorrow was of a godly sort, because it made you more careful of yourselves in your lives and actions. You divested yourselves of every evil to which you had been before addicted; and, with indignation, condemned yourselves for your past follies. You dreaded the vengeance of God, which you knew you then justly deserved, therefore you earnestly desired to be renewed in Christ, and were passionately desirous of the glory of God, and your own welfare. All these instances of a sincere repentance, make it very clear that you are truly sorry for your sins."

"*Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance.*"

Having thus opened my text, I proceed now, in the

First place, To shew the true nature of repentance.

Secondly, To remove some prevailing mistakes about it. And

Lastly, conclude with some proper inferences.

First, I am to shew you the true nature of repentance.

From the method I took to explain my text, it appears, that true repentance consists in a change of the heart and mind from an evil disposition to a good one. A repenting sinner must return to God, under a strong conviction of guilt, and the abominable nature of sin; and the sense of his offending against an infinitely glorious and good Being, whom he is under the highest obligation to obey, should work so powerfully upon his mind, as to make him sincerely regret his having done amiss; and not only so, but it must produce a reformation in his life and conversation; or else his sorrow is not godly sorrow, but worldly sorrow, which worketh death.

Where there is no reformation in life and manners, there is no repentance, because the mind is still the same; and when the mind continues the same, it is in a state of impenitentcy, which will bring the sinner, in the end, to everlasting destruction and misery.

Many of the Jews thought that they, without more ado, should be entitled to heaven and happiness, because they were the children of Abraham; and therefore had but a very imperfect notion of repentance, 'till John the Baptist shewed them their mistake, and told them they must "*bring forth fruits meet for repentance, and think not to say within*

themselves, they have Abraham to their father." Matt. iii. 8.

It was not merely their being of the seed of Abraham that entitled them to the blessings of the promised Messiah; no, but they were commanded to purify their hearts by true repentance; such as would evidently appear by the good fruits of a virtuous and pious life, before they could expect a share in the blessings which Christ would bestow upon his faithful followers.

Many imagine that if they do but feel some remorse of conscience, and have some transient passions of grief and sorrow for their past sins, that that is repentance; and never regard whether it has any influence upon their future conduct, so as to work a reformation in their hearts, and cause them to practice religion and virtue.

But in this they are greatly mistaken, for we shall find scarcely one sinner without such a repentance as this; not one, but who is often convinced of his evil courses, by an accusing conscience, which causes remorse and sorrow, through fear of the vengeance of God.

But what is a sinner's sorrow and tears, if they do not produce a reformation in his life! they are but feigned and hypocritical. He is, perhaps, sorry because he cannot enjoy his beloved sins with more ease and satisfaction to himself, but is determined to go on and gratify his vicious inclinations, though they do

now and then make him uneasy So did Herod, when he swore to the daughter of Herodias, that he would give her whatsoever she would ask; and upon her demanding the head of John the Baptist, it is said, "*The king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oaths sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not deny her; and immediately sent an executioner, and commanded the head to be brought.*" Mark vi. 25, 26, 27.

Herod's sorrow was not repentance; for though he had a strong conviction in his mind that he was about to commit a very henious sin, yet he persisted, and perpetrated an act of the vilest cruelty upon an innocent and just man. So if the sinner is sorry for his sins, and yet continues in them, he is no more a true penitent, than if he went on in an uninterrupted course of wickedness. Nay, on the contrary, when he goes on in sin, in spite of the checks of his conscience, it must be an aggravation of his guilt, and make him so much the greater sinner in the sight of God; for as much as he acts in direct opposition to the clearest conviction of mind.

A man may resolve to leave his sins, and lead a new life, and walk in the commandments of God; and yet this may not be repentance: for mere resolving to do a thing is not doing it; so a man's resolving to repent is not repentance. He must bring his good resolutions into act, or else he can have no certain evidence that his heart is altered; for this

may be only a sudden passion of his mind, occasioned by some particular circumstance that has awaked him from his lethargy, and leaves no lasting impression behind it, but quickly evaporates, and he returns to his old courses again.

A wicked man may, notwithstanding the utmost care and foresight, be brought into imminent danger of his life, or be thrown upon a bed of sickness, which he apprehends to be his last; then his guilty conscience flies in his face, his past actions are exposed to view, and he is terrified with the apprehension of his approaching hour, and dreads the thought of launching into eternity loaded with guilt. Then it is that the vain mortal sees his misery, and is struck with the utmost horror at the prospect of being brought to the bar of heaven to answer for his actions. But when he is delivered from this danger, he forgets the solemn protestations he made to God of amendment, and madly returns to his former wicked courses. Can such a man as this be a penitent? Can he be said to repent? No, it is all worldly sorrow, arising more from the apprehension of his danger, than from a resolution to act better. The fear of the vengeance of God, as the just desert of his sins, makes him bewail his miscarriages, and promise a reformation. But when he is recovered, where are his good resolutions? "*Like a morning cloud, and as the early dew, they pass away.*"

Such sorrow as this is not repentance, and

if a sinner dies under such circumstances, he must be eternally lost and undone! In short, true repentance consists in a deep and unfeigned sorrow for our past sins, and an entire change of heart; productive of a holy and virtuous life; in order to which, the proud heart must be humbled, every secret lust mortified, every evil thought checked, and every vicious habit rooted out.

We must earnestly implore pardon and forgiveness through the merits of Jesus Christ, and appear before our Judge as sinners that have forfeited our lives; bewail our miscarriages, promise amendment, and intreat God's grace to assist us in our good resolutions; and then, when we bring them into act, we need not doubt but that we have rightly performed the duty of repentance. I shall now,

Secondly, Proceed to remove some prevailing mistakes about this important duty.

And First, Some imagine their repentance is not sincere, unless it be accompanied with a great many tears, whenever they review their past actions, or when they are attending the public worship of God. But we very well know that there are many who cannot shed a tear, though they are, at the same time, exceeding sorrowful: and many can shed tears who have no sincere sorrow at all. We should always make allowances for constitutional heats, or melancholly.

Such as are of a melancholy cast, whenever

they examine their lives, are often overpowered with grief, (especially when they have been guilty of crying sins) and this, when the nerves are weak, will vent itself in a flood of tears. But this very soon wears off, and so far is it from leaving any true sorrow behind, that it rather puffs them up with the conceit of being really converted; by this means, they are drawn off their guard, and imagine they have nothing more to do but weep in this manner.

If we measure people's repentance, by the quantity of tears which they shed, we shall find very few men that are penitents.

It is not my intention, by any thing I have now said, to depreciate the value of tears; the virtue of which may cure the disorders of the soul, as the troubled waters of Bethesda did those of the body. But then they are silent, not noisy tears; they are such as are shed not in the church only, but in the closet also. When St. Peter wept, he went out to weep.

True repentance is seated in the inmost recesses of the heart, and is a calm and sober virtue; it does not stand in the eye only, ready to come forth at every melting expression, which works people up into rapturous heats, and ecstatic affections. It is not only modest and silent, but sweet and natural; and we may know it, not by this mechanical whining, but by the reformation it produces in our lives.

When people indulge these passionate im-

pulses, it throws them into a dejection of spirits; then follow perpetual scruples and fearful anxieties, which, if not carefully avoided, may lead to despair.

Again, many think they are not truly penitent, unless they perform some outward acts of penance; and they are persuaded they must inflict upon themselves some bodily punishment, in order to purify the soul. This is the doctrine of the church of Rome. Indeed, the church of Scotland and that of England did formerly run into this error. They obliged the offenders to stand upon the stool of repentance, or in a white sheet, in order to shame them into a better conduct. But this, so far from having the desired effect, rather proved the most effectual method of driving them into greater enormities; they had some modesty, and could blush before they underwent that public penance, but afterwards had lost all modesty, and had forgot to blush from that day. And as modesty and shamefacedness are the guards that nature has put upon our actions; when these are gone, we may bid farewell to religion and virtue.

God has kindly provided repentance for our comfort and happiness, therefore he must be a very weak man, whoever he is, that will undergo a voluntary misery in the very thing from which he is to expect relief and satisfaction.

If the sinner makes a sincere confession of his sins to God, and amends his life, he will find

mercy; and if he does not do so, he need not expect the favour of the Almighty by standing on the stool of repentance, or any thing else he can do.

Another error with respect to repentance is, that some people think it never effectual, unless they have the absolution of the priest. But this is a practice so entirely Popish, that there is no need of exposing it in a Protestant congregation. I shall therefore dismiss this particular, by observing only, that God has promised forgiveness to the sinner upon condition of his repentance. If he repents, he need not doubt of forgiveness, because what God hath promised he will surely perform. And if he does not repent, no absolution of Pope, Bishop, Priest, or any one else, will acquit him in the sight of God.

But it may be said, absolution is not to be given to any, but such only as are truly penitent. I ask, then, how is the priest, or any one except God, to know when a sinner is truly penitent? And if it is not in his power to know this, it is not in his power to absolve him.

The last mistake that I shall mention in the business of repentance, is that of putting it off 'till old age, or at all events, to the approach of death. This is a very dangerous mistake, and many have been encouraged in it by considering the case of the penitent thief upon the cross.

They think, that let them have been ever so wicked, yet when they come to die, if they are sincerely sorry for their sins, they may obtain

mercy, and go to heaven. They depend wholly upon a sudden conversion, and a short death-bed repentance; but this is surely the most pernicious doctrine that can be thought of, because it destroys religion and virtue, and is a plain declaration that there is no necessity for a good life. For if a man can be saved without it, by only repenting at the hour of death, where is the need of it?

The penitent thief is the history of one who died as a malefactor, and yet went to a state of happiness; so, I doubt not, many more who have died as malefactors have gone to a state of happiness; but if they had not repented before they came to die, it is much to be questioned whether they would not have gone to the place appointed for the damned, instead of entering into Paradise.

The scripture does not mention whether the penitent thief was a bad man for the most part of his life; nor does it appear but that he repented long before he was brought to execution. And allowing that he did not repent 'till the very time of his death; how do we know but it may be such an extraordinary favour as will be granted to no other sinner? It therefore must be a very groundless thing to apply his case to a man who has lived a wicked and abandoned life, upon the presumption of repenting at the hour of death.

This malefactor, when he was upon the cross, discovered a very amazing act of faith; he believed Jesus to be the son of God, and able to save him, therefore begged of him to remember

him when he came into his kingdom. His faith was even greater than that of Christ's disciples, for they did not understand that his kingdom was not of this world, but all forsook him and fled.

In short, we may look upon this man's conversion as miraculous as that of St. Paul's. St. Paul preached Christ after his conversion; so did this distinguished sufferer, and sealed a noble confession with his last breath.

And can a wicked and careless sinner, who has denied Christ all his life time, expect such a miraculous conversion as this man's? No, he has no reason to expect it, but rather must dread the vengeance of God for abusing his kind offers of mercy, and neglecting the day of grace.

I shall now, lastly, conclude with some proper inferences. And

First, Let us not deceive ourselves, and think, that after we have spent our youth in the service of the devil, God will be content with the lifeless service of our old age; for this is to suppose he will accept of a mere form of repentance, instead of real reformation.

The gospel, indeed, promises remission of sins upon condition of repentance. But would it not be madness in any one to presume from hence to live an immoral and abandoned life, and repent just when he thinks fit? For how does he know but even this night God may say to him as he said to the rich man in the Gospel, "*Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee.*" Can any man be assured

this shall not be his case? And if it should, what will become of his distant prospect of repentance? How can he avoid being doomed to the exquisite tortures of the damned, since Christ has told us, that except we repent, we shall all likewise perish?

But supposing that God should give us both time and warning to repent, by afflicting us with a lingering death-bed sickness, we shall find enough to do to possess our souls in a decent patience, without fretting, murmuring, or charging God foolishly. Therefore, however his conscience may sting the sinner with remorse, yet he will have no time to reform his ill conduct, and put his good resolutions into practice: without which, there can be no sure evidence that his repentance is sincere; and it is sincerity only that can make it effectual. The divine mercy, to be sure, is inexhaustible; and there is no knowing how available a death-bed repentance may be, as it is the last shift of a poor unthinking mortal; but this we know, that such a state is extremely dangerous and uncertain.

Let us all, then, my brethren, look about us in time, and provide for this day of calamity; as well knowing that there is no work, no device, no repentance in the grave, whither we are all hastening. And let not the men of spirit and mettle laugh at, and despise such a warning as this; for however wanton and negligent, however bold and intrepid they may be, now in their day of health and prosperity; yet the time will come when the scene must alter, and the

curtain of death will be ready to fall; at which time, assuredly, they will be obliged to think more seriously; and with too much reason perhaps, cry out, (in the language of Job) "*Oh that we were as in the months past, as we were in the days of our youth.*"

But God grant that we may all be persuaded to a speedy repentance, and by that means prevent such an unavailing wish! through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, &c. **Amen.**

SERMON IV.

SHEWING THE

IMPORTANCE OF THE QUESTION

PROPOUNDED BY

THE YOUNG MAN IN THE GOSPEL,

CONCERNING

ETERNAL LIFE.

MATTHEW xix. 16.

And behold, one came and said unto him, good master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life.

It is a sign of a wise and understanding heart, and displays a very hopeful disposition, in one that asks a discreet and pertinent question; especially if he makes choice of a person that is likely to answer it with truth and propriety. These qualifications we find are centered in the man in my text. He does not come with a design of shewing his learning and abilities, and to catch our Saviour in his words, as the Pharisees and Herodians did, but with a sincere desire of being instructed in the will of God, as being sensible that was the only way to guide him to life and immortality. And for the accomplishment of this great end, he applies to the Son of God, who he knew came into the world to give men a more amiable idea of religion and virtue.

In the context are several very remarkable things, which constitute the character of the

person who made this enquiry; and do therefore render the question pronounced by him the more interesting. As 1st, in the 20th verse, he is said to be a young man; and yet the warmth and vigour of youth, together with the common presumption of having a long time to live in this world, did not hinder him from thinking of the world to come. Secondly, in the 22d verse, he is represented as a rich man, "*for he had great possessions*," yet the riches, nor the cares, and pleasures of life, did not make him forget the one thing needful. Thirdly, in the 18th chapter of St. Luke, and 18th verse, we find this person is called a ruler, by which we understand a man of rank and figure; yet notwithstanding this he sought the kingdom of God. Lastly, in the 21st verse, he is described to be a virtuous and moral man; for he had "*kept the commandments from his youth up*," nevertheless, he desired to be further instructed in his duty, that he might make sure of eternal life.

Now, since the question was propounded by one of so eminent a character, I shall take occasion to consider

First, The importance of the question, which is indeed very great, and such as every considerate man must have his mind fixed on.

Secondly, That being once satisfied that there is such a state as a life hereafter, he must be divested of his reason who does not earnestly desire to obtain it. And

Thirdly, Whoever desires to possess that blissful state, must do some good for it.

First, then, I am to consider the importance of the question, "*Good master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life.*

This question is of that importance, that every serious Christian must know that he is greatly interested in it; for it is certain that none of us can flatter ourselves of living always in this world. We are convinced of our mortality by observing our neighbours, both young and old, going daily to the grave; and this should lead us to look forward to futurity, and reflect within ourselves, what shall become of us hereafter.

So weighty a consideration as that of our eternal preservation and welfare, demands our utmost prudence and caution, and should sink home to our consciences.

The question is, whether we shall, after death, live for ever in another state, or be for ever buried in oblivion? Whether we shall be as if we had never existed, and our thoughts perish like the beasts of the field, or whether we shall survive our bodies, and exist in the boundless ages of eternity? Or, above every other consideration, whether we shall, for our good actions, be everlastingly rewarded with the most inconceivable felicity, or, for our bad actions, be eternally doomed to such horrible and tremendous punishments, that never entered into the heart of man to conceive? These considerations concern every one of us so deeply, that whoever can withdraw himself from seriously meditating upon them, must do a prodigious violence to his nature, have entirely lost all the

principles of his reason, and effaced every sentiment of humanity.

This question is not only of the utmost moment with respect to a life after this, but it is also of great influence upon our conduct whilst we live here on earth. For, if we can persuade ourselves that there is a supreme Almighty Being, and that our souls are immortal, and that we shall be rewarded or punished according to our actions; we cannot without the greatest madness and stupidity, venture the rage and vengeance of that God who, we must be sensible, knows the most secret intentions of our hearts, and is acquainted with all our ways. And as our life is so uncertain, and we know not how soon we shall be called to this place of eternity, how vain must it be to set our affections upon things in the earth.

The rich man in the gospel never thought of a future state; he filled his barns with provisions for many years; hugged himself with the thoughts of taking his fill of voluptuous pleasures, and set his heart upon his beloved pelf. But when he was surprized with the arrest of death, what became of all his fine schemes? his hopes of pleasure, and all his treasures that he had hoarded up? How must the miserable man have dreaded his fatal doom, when God said unto him, "*Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee!*" But when his poor soul was beset with devils and the ghosts of the damned, it was too late to bewail his folly and madness.

This is the case of every worldly minded

man; he imagines himself the only wise and notable person, prides himself in the conceit of his own cunning and sagacity, and looks upon others as weak people, misled by the cheats and impostures of priests. But what is the reason of this? It is because he never examined into the merits of Christianity, but brought strong prejudices against it, imbibed by means of bad company, or bad books; or else condemned it because he found it inconsistent with the indulgence of some favourite vice which he was determined not to part with. But if he acted rationally, he would attend to the evidence, and not have suffered himself to be biassed to infidelity by his carnal inclinations. If he wishes Christianity may be an imposition, such a wish, like the jaundice that gives a false color to every object, will certainly hinder him from seeing any argument in its favour in a proper light.

But religion will not be the less true for his wishing it were not so. And it will be but a poor comfort to a wicked man to find his mistake in a state of misery.

The most shrewd man, with all his boasted reasoning, can never disprove that there is a state of happiness or misery hereafter. He can never make it appear that he shall not be for ever happy, or for ever miserable, in another life, according as he demeans himself in this. But in a matter of such infinite moment as that of eternity, he should act upon the surest side, where he ventures least if he should happen to be mistaken. And which is the surest side?

to believe or disbelieve this great truth? Surely to believe it, and to regulate his conduct accordingly.

If he is one who never troubles himself to look into these points, nor think them worth his consideration, but lives an extempore life, and follows the impulse of every passion that happens to move him, in this case he acts below the conduct of the brute creation. The beasts of the field, as far as instict teaches them, are ever studious of their own preservation; for when they are alarmed of any danger they carefull avoid it. But such a man as this acts without any regard to his own safety, and as if he had no principle of rationality in him.

But how melancholly must it be to behold the numbers of people who profess their belief of this religious truth, and yet daily, hourly, and deliberately, contradict their faith by their practice? To what an amazing degeneracy and corruption do men run, who will think of any thing rather than eternal life!

But a man that has some expectations beyond the grave, who is satisfied that there is a state of everlasting happiness and misery, must be guilty of the greatest act of folly if he will forego the hopes of eternal life for the sake of any vice whatever.

What! though virtue should be attended with hardships and difficulties, a constant war with the world, the flesh, and the devil; yet when he thinks of an endless reward, he will go on with patience and courage: or else he must have a very mean, opinion of heaven and

happiness, if he thinks them not worth the obedience of a few years, though ever so difficult.

The hopes and expectation of future rewards will always be matter of confidence and courage to a good and virtuous man, and will support him under every misfortune and suffering in this life, for that which Christ has promised to his faithful followers in the world to come. This the discreet person in my text seemed to be very sensible of; therefore, in the prime of his youth, in the flower of his age, and in the higher tide of prosperity, he considered of it. It was not a sick-bed meditation, for he was in health—not a melancholly qualm of old age, for he was young—nor the effects of being discontented and out of humour with the world, for he was rich and prosperous; but it it was the effect of manly sense and wisdom; it was the eager desire of enjoying that happiness, and avoiding that misery, which are to be the rewards of virtuous or bad actions. Which leads me,

Secondly, To consider, that being once satisfied, that there is such a state as a life hereafter, he must be divested of his reason who does not earnestly desire to obtain it.

This is so clear to every intelligent person, that I need say but very little about it, because a man must be supposed to hate himself to the utmost degree who can do otherwise than desire it. For can any one wish to be eternally extinct, or at least to be everlastingly wretched and miserable? No man can think of either of

them without horror; nor, consequently, of eternal life without a kind of ecstasy and desire. When the multitude (which followed our Saviour only for the loaves) began to forsake him, he turns to his disciples, and saith to them, "*Will ye also go away? Lord, saith St. Peter, whither shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.*" As if he had said, "If it were possible to be so destitute of grace and gratitude as not to adhere to thee for thine own goodness and excellency; yet can we be so void of all sense and self-love as to forsake thee and eternal life together?"

The Patriarchs of old, the Apostles and Evangelists, and many others of the primitive Christians, underwent the greatest dangers and difficulties for that recompence of reward which God has promised to such as are faithful unto the end. And what is that recompence of reward? Is it not the blessings of heaven in an eternal future state? "*Abraham looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder is God.*" Heb. xi. 10. "*David was persuaded that God would shew him the path of life, and bring him to a place where there is fullness of joy, and pleasures for ever more.*" Psal. xvi. 11. "*And many took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that they had in heaven a better and enduring substance.*" Heb. x. 34. By all which it appears that eternal life is so infinitely desirable, that, as I said before, there needs but little to be said to prove it; and therefore, upon supposition of the belief of it, the only thing

in question is, what we must do for the attainment of it?

The answer to this question was the third thing proposed, which is, that whoever desires to possess that blissful state, must do some good for it.

And this is implied in the text—"*Good master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?*" And not only in the text, but in numberless other passages of scripture; which are so much at hand to every one that it is needless for me to mention them. I shall therefore observe to you, that there needs no scripture in the case, for as much as it is the natural sense of every man's mind, a principle in our consciences engraven by the very hand of God, so that no art or endeavours can efface it. For what else is the reason that men are brave and comfortable in their spirits, when they have behaved themselves well and virtuously? that they are then erected with hope, and kindly warmed in their breasts with peace and joy? that they can look up towards God with delight, and towards death without consternation? And, on the contrary, what is the cause that when men are conscious to themselves, to have lived wickedly, and done base and unworthy actions, that their spirits are down, their very countenance falls, and all things look black and melancholly about them? What, I say, can be the ground of this remarkable diversity in men's secret sense, but the force and efficacy of that eternal truth which

God pronounced to Cain, and hath written upon every man's heart: "*If thou dost well, shalt thou not be accepted? but if thou dost not well, sin lieth at the door.*" Gen. iv. 7. So that there can be no doubt of the proposition in general, that he that will hope to live for ever, and be happy in another life, must do good in this, which will tend to make us happy, and free us from misery; for virtue will bring some benefit to us, whilst vice will croud us with all inconveniencies.

If we hope to be happy, we must be devout in our addresses towards God; for nothing is more reasonable than to make him our friend who is able to make us happy or miserable; and the way to make him our friend is to observe all the virtues of a good life. On the contrary, impiety or a neglect of virtue, is plainly against our interest; for this is to disoblige him, who is more able to make us miserable than all the world besides, and without whose favour nothing can make us happy.

Our blessed Lord informs the young man in my text, *that if he would enter into life, he should keep the commandments.* As if he had said, "It is not enough that you observe any one precept, but you must make conscience of them all; you must not rest yourself satisfied with having done any one or more single acts of virtue; that will not do to qualify you for eternal life: it is an uniform goodness, a divine temper, and an heavenly conversation that must procure you that happiness." This answer of our Lord overturns a corrupt opinion which

the Jews had amongst them. They thought that God set a greater value upon some of his laws than he did upon others; and that if any man would come up to them, he might easily be dispensed with in neglect of the rest. But this the young man seems to be aware of, and to have escaped this common error: for he replies, *All these I have kept from my youth up. What lack I yet?* As if he had said, "I am very sensible that without universal obedience to the laws of God, I cannot approve myself to his divine majesty; and therefore I have endeavoured, through the whole course of my life, conscientiously to discharge my whole duty as far as I understood it; but because I would not fail of that great good which you have published to the world, therefore my further enquiry is, if there be not something that may be done more effectually, to secure me of my desires." To this our Saviour replies, *Why then, if thou wilt be perfect, sell all that thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.* Not that our Lord intended this for a standing rule, or a necessary condition of eternal life: for we do not find that any where through the whole gospel he hath so universally and indispensibly propounded it. But his meaning is, that those who will be Christians, must maintain a readiness and disposition to relieve the distresses of their fellow creatures, in opposition to covetousness, or an anxious thirst after the riches of this world. However, this seemed an hard condition to the young man, who, we are told, was rich;

therefore he went away sorrowful; which plainly shews that unregenerate and carnal men are sadly concerned where they cannot have heaven upon their own, or very easy terms.

There is scarce any one duty but what a man would undertake for once, if, without more to do, he might be saved by it. But it is not one generous and good action that will please God, but a constant course of obedience to him, he having himself told us, that to obey is better than sacrifice.

The result, then, of all is this; the plain and beaten way to heaven is to be habitually good and holy, and to make conscience all along of every commandment of God; and this will not fail to bring us to our desired journey's end: therefore the wisest way to secure so great a good is generously to resolve to do all the great things we can, thereby to demonstrate both the greatness of our minds, and the great value and sense we have of such inestimable happiness.

What remains then, but that in consideration of what has been said, we reflect upon ourselves, and examine what good we have already done, and what lies in our power to do, that so we may enter into life.

We cannot but be sensible that our present life wears away apace; death is making daily approaches towards us, and the great concerns of eternity draw on; therefore, as the wise man advises, *whatsoever good thing our hand finds to do, let us do it with all our might.* This is the time of probation for another world, now we

stand candidates for heaven; and now, or never, we must secure ourselves of eternal life.

I have already observed to you, that eternal life is infinitely desirable, and am persuaded that every one hopes for it. But does a sinner, like Naaman the Assyrian, expect to be cured in state? To be saved easily and cheap? To be brought to heaven whether he will or no? Does he understand what eternal life is? And can any thing be too great for the attainment of it? What would not most men give for a continuance of this present life, which is little else but care and fear, folly and jealousy, pain and sickness, and at last ends in death? But to live for ever! this is a pearl of such a price, that a wise merchant would give all that he hath to buy it.

Shall a little ease, a little pleasure, a little money, make us be content to be eternally damned? Shall heaven and everlasting blessedness seem dear to us at the price of these? Is it not better to deny ourselves a little ease here, that we may rest for ever with Abraham and the Patriarchs in the kingdom of God? Is it not better to forego a little momentary pleasure at present, than to be eternally tormented hereafter? Were it not a wiser bargain to be somewhat poorer in this world, so we may inherit a kingdom in the world to come? Eternity is not far off; there is but the lease of one short life between us and heaven.

Let us then, as wise men, look before us, and not be taken up with the sensible objects of a

vain world. Let us not think that a few cheap prayers, or some slight alms, or a formal profession of Christianity, will purchase us happiness hereafter. Let us, as Christians, imitate our Master in doing good actions, great as our capacities, and great as our hopes. And as we hope our souls will survive these mortal bodies, let us not fail to do all the great and good things we can.

Let us lay up in store a good foundation of good works against the time to come, that so we may lay hold on eternal life, and inherit those mansions of bliss, which Christ has gone before to prepare for his faithful servants.

Now to him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy; to the only wise God our Saviour be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

SERMON V.

BY WHICH

THE NECESSITY OF DIVINE GRACE,

IN ORDER TO

MAN's OBEDIENCE,

IS

CLEARLY DEMONSTRATED.

PSALM lxxxi. 12.

So I gave them up unto their own hearts lusts, and they walked in their own counsels.

THE great God is introduced in this psalm recounting to the children of Israel the many signal instances of favour and mercy which he had vouchsafed them in the times of their calamity and distress. A copious subject, fit for an infinitely gracious God to enter upon, which can be exhausted by infinity alone.

Thou calledst upon me, says he, in trouble, and I delivered thee in all thy necessities, and answered every complaint. When you groaned under the cruel oppression of the Egyptian task-masters, I eased your shoulders from making the pots. I went through the land of Egypt, and destroying all their first born, brought you forth with a mighty hand, and a stretched out arm.

Again, when you cried unto me in a new distress; when Pharaoh, with his chariots and horsemen, pursued and overtook you encamped at the Red Sea: the Egyptians whom you saw

that day with sore amazement and fear, ye saw them again no more for ever; but, in raptures of joy sung, *The Lord hath triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.*

Once more, having escaped this danger, and got into a barren and dry wilderness, where famine and dearth seemed to reign, then I sent manna from heaven and fed you in abundance with the food of angels. I also smote the stony rock and the waters gushed out, and the streams flowed withal; feeding and sustaining you at the expence of a daily miracle. Thus I plead my title to your obedience. *Wherefore, hear O my people, and I will testify unto thee O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me; there shall be no strange God in thee; I am the Lord thy God which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, open thy mouth wide and I will fill it.* Enlarge thy desires, and I will satisfy the utmost measure of them.

Could it be imagined that these people could so soon forget this God who had done so great things for them, and loved them almost to a degree of fondness? And yet, amazing to think on it! we find him entering a heavy complaint against them in the following words. *But my people would not hear my voice, Israel would none of me; they turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them; they made them a molten calf, and worshipped it, and sacrificed thereunto, and said these be thy Gods O Israel which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. So being daily provoked and worn out by*

their obstinacy and ingratitude, I gave them up unto their own hearts lusts, and they walked in their own counsels.

Behold the just and extreme judgment of God upon incorrigible sinners, when he has tried all the methods of doctrine and discipline, correction and love, but in vain. Just is it therefore with God to leave those to themselves who have so ungratefully forsaken him; and dreadful is the condition of those who are so given up to their own hearts lusts, and suffered to walk in their own counsels.

I shall endeavour to engage your attention, whilst I pursue this subject in the following manner.

First, I shall lay before you the necessity of God's assisting grace, in order to man's obedience.

Secondly, That nevertheless this grace is not always effectual.

Thirdly, The justice of God in withdrawing the slightest offers of it.

Fourthly, The wretched condition of those from whom it is withdrawn.

And then I shall conclude with a short application.

I am in the first place then to lay before you the necessity of God's assisting grace, in order to man's obedience.

All men in all ages have been sensible of the great proneness of human nature to evil; and the renowned philosophers of the heathen world, who studied nature much, and understood it well, were at a loss for the reason of that wrong

bias in mankind; and could not trace out the pernicious principle upon which to charge such universal depravity: yet too well they knew that so it was it fact. Accordingly, we hear them loudly and passionately lamenting the fatal untractableness of the soul to virtue; the hanging of her wings, and the drooping of her noblest faculties.

We have many instances of the greatest men failing, even in those virtues, in the exercise of which they were remarkably distinguished.

Look into the Book of Life: there you will meet with Abraham's distrust in God; the peevish anger of Moses; the impatience of Job; and to give you the most pregnant uncontrolable example of this sad truth, the stout and resolved St. Peter sunk into a coward, and denied his master. Who could have entertained more elevated thoughts of his own strength, and after all more shamefully betrayed his own weakness. If Adam, whom we are told God made upright, and created him after his own image, was no sooner left into the hands of his own counsel, but fell from his original righteousness, it can be no reflection to affirm, that man, now impotent and corrupt, is incapable of directing his own way. For, O Lord God! What is man destitute of thy assistance? The load of natural corruption lies heavy upon him, and presses him down. With Peter he begins to sink, and must inevitably perish without thy favourable interposition. In his best estate, under the greatest order and regularity of his faculties, he must take up that

complaint of St. Paul, and say, *I see a law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin.* So that to be left to our own strength to perform an acceptable obedience, is, in effect, the same as to be left under an utter impossibility of performing it: but, our sufficiency is of God. To him we owe the first disposition and tendency towards good; not only the execution of the hand, but the preparation of the heart is from the Lord. He stretches himself over our dead souls, as the prophet upon the widow's son, to recover spiritual warmth and life in them. He gives birth to every good thought; encourages that thought into act, and rewards that act with complacency.

Cease, then, ye advocates for nature, to deck and adorn her with the spoils of grace.

How these secret assistances are conveyed to us, and the manner of their operation, we cannot perfectly comprehend. Neither can we explain how the dew of heaven impregnates the earth and makes it fruitful. But as the drops of rain come down from heaven in their season to water the furrows of the earth, and cause the little vallies thereof to laugh and sing, so may the dew of God's heavenly blessing descend upon us: may it soften our hearts, and prepare them for growth and improvement under its gracious influences; and may our obedience and thankfulness return up thither, as the smell of a field which the lord hath blessed.

Indeed, the communication of God's Spirit

with the hidden man of the heart, is, in the ordinary methods of its acting, so gentle and imperceptible, that what is transacted there might seem to be the sole result of our reason and better choice; did not experience as well as scripture abundantly testify, that in ourselves, *i. e.* in our flesh dwelleth no good thing: so that we are obliged, in reason and justice, to write upon every good action which we perform that confession of St. Paul: *Not I, but the grace of God that is in me.*

But however weak and unequal we may prove in the fight between the flesh and the spirit, yet we may be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, who spoiled principalities and powers, and made a shew of them openly; leading them as so many pinioned captives after the chariot of his cross.

But if the supernatural assistances of God's grace are so necessary to man's obedience, and withal so powerful in their operation, it may be asked, how comes it to pass that they are not always effectual? The answer to this question was the second thing proposed.

That all things are alike to an omnipotent Being; and that the spirit of God can work so forceably as to make all opposition fall before it, must be granted. But we have no reason to infer from thence, that this Almighty Being acts to the utmost stretch and extent of his power.

He was pleased once to create man at full stature; is there any reason that he should always do so? He converted St. Paul in a most

miraculous manner; has any man a right to hope for the like favour? Frequent instances of such overpowering grace we must not expect to meet with; because, to invert the nature of things, to break through the fundamental laws of the creation, though it may serve to demonstrate the power of the Almighty, yet, with reverence be it spoken, it does not equally commend his wisdom. But, manifold as the works of God are, in wisdom hath he made them all.

And since it was agreeable to his wisdom that man should be furnished with a principle to discern between good and evil, and a liberty of acting in pursuance of that principle, unless God should alter our nature, pluck out the essentials of a man, and make him another creature, he cannot deal with us otherwise than as voluntary agents, in a manner suitable to our faculties: by persuasion, not constraint; by exercising our powers, not over-ruling them; in such a way and by such methods as may improve human nature, not supersede and destroy it. Therefore, though the grace of God be mighty, it is not violent to compel; though strong, it is not irresistible: it demands a ready entertainment, and when we perform our part, the end is answered. For, as Mary was the mother of Christ, so the Christian soul must be the parent of its divine productions.

Whereas, if a man will obstinately hold out against the means of grace; abuse and resist the holy Spirit, and refuse to be overcome, those gracious assistances may, in the event,

prove ineffectual; not because grace was wanting to us, but because we were wanting to grace: as the sun in its meridian brightness cannot make a man see, if he will shut his eyes and obstinately wink hard against it. I now proceed,

Thirdly, To lay before you the justice of God in withdrawing the slightest offers of his grace.

Simon, Simon, (saith our blessed Lord) *behold Satan hath desired to have thee, but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not.* The devil is not more vigilant to work our destruction, than the Spirit of God is to defeat his attempts. But when men are obstinately attached to the enemy, and betray the succours of grace; when neither the judgments of God can learn them righteousness, nor his goodness lead them to repentance, then the controversy is decided. Just is it with God to give them up as unworthy of his future care.

The doctrine of God's consigning men over to a reprobate mind, in pursuance of an absolute irrespective decree, draws consequences after it too horrid to be mentioned, and turns his gracious dealings with men into downright mockery. Contrary to this pernicious doctrine, how does the good God wait that he may be gracious? Pay attendance upon us through the tedious stages of our folly and vanity; knocking at the door of our hearts, and importuning for admittance? How does he become a supplicant to his creatures, and court the work of his own hand? He that shed tears

at the grave of Lazarus; wept over the city of Jerusalem, saying, *O Jerusalem, wilt thou not be made clean, when shall it once be?* In what affectionate and endearing terms does he expostulate with them: *Why will ye die? As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth; turn yourselves and live! How often would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Oh that there were such a heart in them, that they would keep my commandments always, that it might be well with them and their seed for ever.*

Now, if all the methods of his goodness cannot reform them; if all his loving kindness be repaid with ingratitude and contempt; and the offers of his grace produce no other effect than abuse and scorn; no wonder if God withdraw his mercy from us, and shut up his loving kindness in displeasure.

We may expect, that like an abused friend, he will ply us no more with unwelcome importunities, but suffer the unkind design against ourselves to prosper. And what injustice can we charge this proceeding with, which amounts to no more than, after many unsuccessful and neglected offices of kindness, to cease contending with wretches who will not be persuaded to their own advantage? Which leads me to the

Fourth and last proposal, which is to consider the dreadful condition of those from whom the grace of God is withdrawn.

A condition, such as might justify the liberty of the speaker, should he use those peremptory words of Elisha, concerning Benhadad, king of

Syria, *The Lord hath shewed me that he shall surely die.* For how can their case be other than desperate, whom the unerring physician of our souls hath given over unto death, as men who have no appetite to do good; have lost all sense of their duty, and in whom the spiritual pulse is gone? They would not accept of God's grace to prevent their sins, and now they are denied that grace to repent of them. They have extinguished the light of reason, blotted out the law of their nature, and effaced the notions of good and evil. And what principle, I pray, remains to curb and restrain the violence of their lusts? What should hinder, but that they go on with an uninterrupted sanguine security, to work all manner of iniquity and uncleanliness with greediness; *treasuring up for themselves wrath against the day of wrath; which, when the measure of their iniquity is filled up, shall come upon them to the uttermost.*

Sleep on now and take your rest, are the words of the Son of Man to his disciples, when the hour was come that he should be taken away from them. And if we are deaf to the repeated calls of the holy Spirit; if they cannot rouse us to watchfulness and prayer; the time will come when he shall be taken away from us, and then we shall be suffered to sleep on, and take our rest, 'till we awake either in this or another world (not to escape) but to see our eternal destruction. Then, perhaps, we shall call upon God, but he will not hear, or if he vouchsafe us any answer, we must expect that sarcastical

killing reproach: *Ye have forsaken me, and served other Gods; go, cry unto the Gods whom ye have served.*

Thus I have gone through all the particulars at first proposed. Let me now intreat a little more of your patience, whilst I make a short application of what has been said.

Now the foregoing discourse should persuade us (from a sense of our own weakness and insufficiency) to watch and pray incessantly for the divine assistance; plying earnestly at the throne of Grace, that it would please the Almighty, who knoweth whereof we are made, to grant us the help of his grace, to enlighten our understandings that we may know, and incline our wills that we may pursue the things that belong to our peace. Of the success of these addresses we cannot doubt, being warranted by our Lord himself thus to argue: *If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the holy spirit to them that ask him?* But then, we must meet all his assistances with a ready compliance, welcome every suggestion of this blessed Monitor, lest he withdraw the slighted offers of his mercy, and make no further attempts upon men, too hard to be softened, too desperate to be reclaimed.

Justice, we know, is as much a perfection of the divine Nature as Mercy, because both are infinite. 'Tis our privilege, and cost him dear who purchased it for us, that from offended Justice we may appeal to Mercy; but Mercy despised and outraged, whither shall we turn, or

where shall we seek for refuge. If grace and salvation itself be abused and turned into wantonnness, who or what shall save us from the wrath to come?

Who knows how far the measure of his iniquity is from being filled up? Who can ascertain the time when the diffinitive irreversible doom shall pass upon him? Who knows, but being advanced thus towards the regions of death, the next step may sink us to such a depth from whence there is no return.

To conclude; since there is no judgment, short of hell, like that of being *given up to our own hearts lusts, and suffered to walk after our own counsels*, let us pray, in the words of our Liturgy, that God would "deliver us from hardness of heart, and contempt of his word and commandments; that he would be pleased to work in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure, that so we may work out our salvation with fear and trembling, and receive the reward of that grace which was not bestowed upon us in vain in the realms of everlasting glory.

SERMON VI.

IN WHICH IS SET FORTH

THE

VARIOUS DELUSIONS OF SIN.

GALATIONS vi. 7.

Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

THE great Apostle St. Paul, in this text, has laid down the general and fundamental doctrine of the Christian religion, which is, that every man shall finally be rewarded according to his actions in this life.

This is a maxim so agreeable to the natural reason of mankind, that it is universally made the foundation of all laws; it is the maintenance and support of government, and the pillar and ground-work of all religion. This doctrine, that every creature shall at the last awful day of judgment, be rewarded by the unerring and impartial judgment of the great Creator; this, I say, is undeniably proved by all the principles of reason, and expressly confirmed, not only by numberless passages in the old Testament, but we are frequently assured of it by our divine Legislator in the new. Yet so numerous, so various are the delusions of

sin, and such a mist of darkness do the sensual desires of mankind cast before their own eyes, that the Apostle thought it absolutely necessary to give his too easily deluded brethren this caution in my text, and frequently to repeat it, in other places, upon the like occasion. *Be not deceived,* says he, *neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of heaven;* and then assures them, and us, that *because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience;* even upon the heathens, if they live in their debauched practices, contrary to the light of nature, and to the eternal laws of truth and reason.

That prudent and considerate man, who takes a survey of the world about him, cannot but be astonished and grieved at the madness and folly of the generality of his fellow creatures, who act, for the most part, like rational beings, except in that important concern of a life after this; which (with shame and grief be it spoken) is seldom thought of 'till they are ready to launch into it.

And whence can this proceed from? Why, from the many deceitful objects that they meet with in this theatre of vanity, which draw them from their duty, and prevent them from observing this great foundation of religion, that every man shall finally receive of God according to what he has done, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

What the principle of these delusions are, I shall make it the business of this discourse to enquire.

The first, then, that most obviously offers itself in the survey of mankind, is that general carelessness and inattention which most men do unfortunately labour under. Instead of considering the design of their creation, we find them in the pursuit of ambition and covetousness.

The ambitious man spends his days in the quest of fame, and in aspiring to posts of honour; and in this he places his chief happiness. But could he be persuaded to suffer his reason to throw off the mask, which his fancy has put upon these things, he would then discover nothing but emptiness and vanity. He would then perceive, that there is no glory like that of a generous and honest mind; no applause like that of a man's conscience, when it displays itself in good and virtuous actions. And who would quit the inward joy and content of his soul for the perishing baubles of this transitory world? This would be to leave a lasting happiness to follow a phantom or dream.

But, notwithstanding all this, what difficulties do men chuse to undergo, only to be loaded with heavier sorrows; to be amazed with greater fears, and to bring upon themselves greater trouble and perplexity. In like manner, the covetous man, whose mind is continually bent upon accumulating wealth, and making a fortune, who is continually filling his bags with gold, and hoarding up his money, only brings upon himself so much the more

vexation and anxiety. For between the care of keeping, and the fear of losing this idol of his heart, he is deprived of the enjoyment of that which, perhaps, he has been toiling for the greatest part of his life. So idle and so fruitless is all the industry of ambition and covetousness!

Behold the unthinking man, who breaks his sleep, and racks his brain, and employs his skill to no purpose, but to be more unhappy and uneasy than he was before. He labours continually to gratify his passions and appetites, and is so far from paying that homage which is due from a despicable worm to an all-glorious Creator, that his life is one continued series of rebellion. He never allows himself time to consider, that the great God is a constant spectator of all his actions. He little thinks that he is acquainted with all his ways; that he has beset him behind and before; that he is present in our hearts, and beholds all the impurity that is acted in our thoughts and desires.

The supreme Being is conscious to the fraud of the unjust deceiver; there is not a proud thought or secret lust in our hearts but he views with the utmost indignation.

No idle pretences, no pitiful excuses, no pleas of necessity, will avail that man (in the day of judgment) who has habitually neglected the service of God, and apostatized from the faith. For however he may stifle his conscience and impose upon the world, yet the great King of Heaven cannot be deceived. He can discern the heart of an hypocritical Pharisee under all

his broad philactory, and knows from what fountain his actions proceed. There is no trimming with the world without his knowledge; nor can the most sly and subtle sinner act any thing so secret as to escape the all-seeing eye of that God who is too pure to behold iniquity without punishing the offender. With what awful reverence, then, ought we to think of this all-powerful and all-seeing God! When we consider that there is a day of retribution hourly approaching us, when we shall all be called to an account, and the most minute circumstances shall be evidently disclosed. But, alas! how little do men make of that day; and how greatly do they slight that judgment.

In this world there appears to be no difference between the just and the unjust, but that it fares much alike with him that sacrifices, and with him that sacrifices not; this draws men, inconsiderately, into the paths of vice, as if things would never have an end, but should always continue as they now are; and so they go on, adding one day's crime to another, 'till they are surprized with the arrest of death; at which time they would give, if it were possible, a thousand worlds but for Hezekiah's lease of life, to provide for that dreadful day hereafter.

How vain is man! *Every man*, says holy David, *at his best estate is altogether vanity*. His soul is deceived and ensnared by the suggestions of his senses, which represent the visible objects of this life so pleasing to his carnal appetites, that things of a spiritual nature are to him as

mere matters of fancy and conceit. And when the world has got possession of his heart, it has all the powers and faculties of his mind at command, and he is captivated and made a slave to ungovernable passions; the consequence of which is a coolness for spiritual improvement, a disrelish for religious duties, and a very dangerous state of his soul.

Indeed, it is very observable that those temptations in the world which appear very innocent and natural, are very often of fatal consequence. For instance, it is very natural, and very reasonable, that a man should endeavour to make a provision suitable to his station, and the state of his family. Our reason and conscience dictate, that we should be diligent in our callings, in order to the support and comfort of life. But then our minds are continually intent upon these things, without any regard to the one thing needful; if we place our affections upon them, and are continually anxious about them, they will be dangerous temptations. For when we covet the riches, honours, and pleasures of this world, they exclude the love of God from our hearts; they lead us into sin, which produces misery, and the end is eternal destruction.

Secondly, The next thing by which mankind are so easily deceived is, that they imagine God is very easy to be pacified, and is pleased with every little appearance of virtue, without regarding men according to the whole tenour of a virtuous or vicious life. And hence, though they indulge themselves in the habit of any

plain vice, though they live in a state of adultery, fornication, intemperance, fraud, or any other unrighteous act; yet they hope to appease God with some external forms of worship; they think that their attendance at some place of public worship will screen their villainies in this life, and sufficiently atone for them in the next. Poor deluded sinners! thus idly to impose upon themselves, and presumptuously to affront the Majesty of heaven!

Let them but consult the scriptures, and they will find, that no ceremonious methods of attonement will satisfy an offended God. This the prophet very strongly declares in these words: *To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hands to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons, and appointed feasts, my soul hateth; they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when you spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make long prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash ye, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes. Cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.*

Finally, Let not the sinner deceive himself. God is not to be mocked. If he goes on in an habitual course of debauchery, and thinks that God will accept of a few empty ceremonies, he will find himself sadly mistaken at the last. His hope will be the hope of the hypocrite, which is as the spider's web. Rather let him remember that his future harvest will be answerable to the actions of this life: and *that as he hath sown, so he must expect to reap; i. e.* he that soweth to the flesh, he that gratifieth his sensual desires, shall reap corruption; decaying pleasures here, and eternal perdition hereafter, must be his portion. But he that soweth to the Spirit, he that makes a conscience of his duty, that adheres, as near as human frailty will admit, to the eternal laws of truth and reason, he, we are told, shall, of the Spirit, reap everlasting life; the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead, shall raise up him also; and, at the final day of retribution, shall reward his fidelity in this life with a crown of eternal glory in the next.

Thirdly, Another delusion by which wicked men impose upon themselves, is that of their going on in a vicious course of life, upon the general notion of the mercy, patience, and goodness of the Almighty, never considering whether they themselves are proper and capable objects of his mercy and compassion.

And these deceive themselves by fixing their attention wholly upon one single attribute of the Almighty; and consider not the great God as endowed with all those perfections together,

which compleat the character of an all-wise and righteous Governor of the Universe.

They consider not, that as power, though infinite, is still confined to what is the object of power, and does, by no means, extend to contradictions; so mercy, however infinite, is always limited to things which naturally are the objects of mercy. Wherefore, though God is, indeed, long-suffering, and of great patience, and grants all mankind both space and time of repentance, (for he created none to perish, but would have all embrace the terms of salvation) I say, though God is thus forbearing, yet sin is an abomination to him; his long suffering when abused will have an end, and with greater severity he will execute his vengeance upon the impenitent sinner.

God has declared, *that his Spirit shall not always strive with man.* Let not the sinner then despise the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long suffering, as if he did not know that the goodness of God leadeth him to repentance: *but, after the hardness and impenitency of his heart, treasures up to himself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who, by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory and honour, and immortality, eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil.* The final punishment of sin is not at all the

less certain by being remote and at a distance; *seeing that one day is with God as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.* As St. Peter observes, *The Lord knoweth how to reserve the unjust to the day of judgment to be punished.*

Great, therefore, is the deceit, and fatal the error, by which all those deceive themselves, who continue in their sins, because God's mercy, goodness, and compassion knows no bounds.

Fourthly, Another delusion is, when men value themselves upon their being of a particular sect, without any regard to the goodness of their lives and actions.

But let me tell those much deceived people, that no particular profession will save its members; for with what delusions soever, and in whatsoever forms men impose upon themselves, still the Apostle's assertion will for ever remain true: *He only that doth righteousness is righteous, and whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*

The Jews valued themselves greatly in being the peculiar people of God, and despised all such as were not of their own nation; and the Pharisees, in particular, looked with the utmost contempt upon those whom they called Publicans and Sinners, and were ready to say, stand by thyself, for I am holier than thou. And yet we find that our Saviour regarded them not one jot the more upon this account, but often branded them as hypocrites, a generation of vipers, an evil and adulterous generation. And the instance of the Pharisee and Publican that

went into the Temple to pray, is sufficient to convince us that God is no respecter of persons; for there we find, that the Publican was justified rather than the Pharisee, notwithstanding that he valued himself so much upon his profession.

In a word, it is (through the merits of Christ) a man's integrity, and not his being of any particular sect, that must gain him acceptance with God; for, as St. Peter saith, *In every nation*, (and consequently in every denomination) *he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him.*

Fifthly, The last delusion that I shall mention, and which is, above all, the most pernicious and extensive, is the imaginary design of future repentance.

The great doctrine of the gospel is this, that whosoever sincerely and effectually repents, shall, through the redemption and intercession of Christ Jesus, obtain remission of his past sins, and be rewarded with eternal happiness. But shall a sinner imagine that he may, from hence, indulge himself in a debauched and unrighteous way of life, and repent just when he thinks fit? Can he flatter himself that an all-powerful and righteous God will be content with the cold services of his old age, when the devil has had the services of his youth? Is an earthly king to be persuaded to turn his court into an hospital, and to be attended by cripples? Even to imagine him capable of being prevailed upon to do such a thing, either by flattery or persuasion, would be an affront to

his understanding. And shall we think that to be right in man, which is not so in the Almighty?

Such a repentance as this is turning the grace of God into wantonness, or making Christ the minister of sin; or, according to the words in my text, deceiving ourselves by attempting to mock God. For the repentance spoken of in the gospel is not the passion, but the virtue of repentance; it is a real change of mind; such a sincere amendment of life and manners as is, in the scripture, very suitably and significantly styled the new man.

And now, either there is a day of retribution, or there is not? If there is not, why then, what are we doing? Why any regard to truth and honesty, any further than to keep out of the reach of human laws? Why do we not make our way pleasant and easy through life, though we do it to the injury and disadvantage of our neighbours. Not to do so, when there is no account to be given either here or hereafter, is to confess ourselves narrow spirited and cowardly animals.

But if there is such an account, if there be any such thing as the comforts of Abraham's bosom, surely we should endeavour to obtain them. We should not postpone our repentance, as we know neither the day nor the hour of our master's coming; but should embrace that gracious invitation of our Lord: *Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* So reviving should it be to a poor sinner, so comfortable to consider, that his

offended God is, upon his sincere repentance, both willing and ready to forgive him.

We should consider the uncertainty of our length of days, and that our future harvest will be answerable to what we have sown in this life; that it is now we must secure ourselves of that welcome sentence from the King of Glory: *Well done thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.* Oh joyful words! Oh welcome sentence! How greatly should we study to obtain it? How much should we despise the vain pomp and vanity of this life, if we hope to be happy in the next? How studious should we be to keep that tremendous day of account in our view? And since we shall be rewarded according to our deeds, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness.

But if the eternal weight of glory that awaits our good actions is not sufficient to excite us to forsake our darling sins, and, like lost sheep, to return to our great shepherd, perhaps the dread of an eternity of pain may have some influence upon us.

Let us attend a little and hear the sentence which Christ himself tells us he will pronounce upon the wicked at the final day of judgment: *Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.* I say, let us attend to these words; perhaps there may be more in them than we are aware of. *Depart from me ye cursed.* Where? Not to your former habitations which ye possessed on earth: not to fine houses, plenteous tables, great offices

and dignities; not to wear your purple, and fare sumptuously every day: No, but to a gloomy prison of exquisite torments, from whence you shall never be released. Go to the place prepared for apostate spirits, dwell with them in misery, whom you chose to imitate in sin and rebellion against your Creator and Lord; dwell with them that hate you, that have sought your ruin, and now will triumph over you in it; and be as miserable as the mutual hatreds and contentions, the scorn and insults of enemies can make you; and what is still worse, dwell in all this misery and vexation for ever!

Thus is the horror and woe of this sentence fortified on every part; and thus must every wicked man expect to be treated in another life.

May such thoughts as these work in us such a change as may lay the foundation of the hopes of a welcome reception from the Lord of Life.

I shall conclude with that merciful warning which Christ our Judge has left us upon record. *Take heed,* says he, *therefore, to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life, and so that day come upon us unawares. For as a snare shall it come upon all them that dwell upon the face of the whole earth; watch ye, therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.*

SERMON VII.

THE

GREAT IMPORTANCE

OF

PRIVATE AND FAMILY PRAYER,

IN ORDER TO A

RELIGIOUS LIFE.

JOSHUA xxiv. 15.

But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

FROM these words I shall take occasion to discourse to you of the necessity and great importance of private and family prayer. And, in order to this, I shall,

First, Shew that it is the indispensible duty of every one to retire into his closet, and pray to his heavenly Father in secret.

Secondly, That it is the duty of every governor of a family to call every one of his household together, and offer up their joint prayers to God for his blessing and protection.

Thirdly, I shall endeavour to answer the objections to this duty.

And, lastly, conclude with a suitable application.

First, I am to shew that it is the indispensible duty of every one to retire into his closet, and pray to his heavenly Father in secret.

And this is very evident from the nature of the thing itself. For private worship is a surer

testimony of our belief in God's omniscience, than public devotions can be, because it is not to be supposed that a man would shut himself in a closet and pray, unless he had a firm belief that he was addressing himself to a Being of infinite knowledge; a Being who knows the secrets of his heart, knows his wants and infirmities, and is all-powerful to grant his requests whenever he sees it fitting.

But in public prayer it may be otherwise. A man's heart is so treacherous, that he often deceives himself as well as the world, and makes himself believe that he is acting upon a religious motive, while he is influenced by views of interest, or a principle of vain glory: like the Pharisees of old, he prays in public, that he may be seen of men, out of custom, decency, or some worldly motive.

But in private prayer a person cannot be deceived, because praying in secret is founded upon the belief of God's omniscience, and the constant exercise of it must naturally keep up in our minds a due sense of being under the all-seeing eye of God, which will be a means to restrain us from committing even the most secret sin; and it is our secret sin that we are in the greatest danger of.

Besides, in private we have an opportunity to be more particular in our prayers than it is possible to be in public. We have, all of us, some particular sins to confess; some particular temptations to pray against; some particular wants to be satisfied, and some particular blessings to give thanks for. Now, we cannot

make these particular circumstances, peculiar to each of us, the subject of our public devotions; therefore we must retire into our closets, and pray to our heavenly father in secret.

If we attend the public devotions of our families, or at the church, ever so constantly, still there is a necessity for daily private devotions, that we may confess our secret sins, give thanks to God for our particular blessings, and pray particularly for his divine Grace to protect us from those temptations to which we are most liable.

When we are thus particular in confessing our secret sins, and in acknowledging the mercies and blessings of our Creator, it must have a much stronger effect upon our minds than if we only did all this in a public and general manner.

Among the many excellent instructions given, by our Saviour to his disciples is this: *When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.* And this he practised himself; he chose a mountain, a desert, or a garden, for this purpose; and, that he might be more private, he prayed at night; when he was unobserved by any human eye. *A great while before it was day, he went out and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.* At another time, *he continued all night in prayer to God.*

Many examples of this kind we have in the scriptures: *Hannah prayed unto the Lord, and*

wept sore; she spoke in her heart, and her voice was not heard. David remembered God upon his bed, and meditated on him in the night-watches. Abraham was alone when he stood before the Lord and prayed for Sodom. Jeremiah's soul wept in secret places for the pride of his people. And Peter went up upon the house top to pray about the sixth hour. *All these are written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope.*

We are not obliged always to be upon our knees, but we ought once every day at least to retire into some secret place, and perform this important duty. And, when we do this, it will be an effectual means of increasing our faith; will make us perfectly resigned to the will of Providence, and ready to perform all possible acts of kindness to our fellow creatures. When we come out of the closet to worship God in the family, or to the public worship in church, we are then much better prepared for it than if we had neglected this duty; the public ordinances would be more improving to us, and we should relish religious exercises with greater pleasure.

What can tend more to alleviate an afflicted mind, which is, perhaps, labouring under the pressure of losses and disappointments, under sickness, or some bodily pain, than to retire in secret and vent its grief, and implore the divine assistance? And what greater comfort can there be to a man, than to think that he is addressing himself to a gracious Father, who

has promised to reward him openly for such secret acts of piety? The bountiful Creator will, most assuredly, reward him openly in this life, or that which is to come.

Every one has something in his constitution or situation that subjects him to particular temptations, which requires that he should be very watchful over himself; to give a due attention to his thoughts, words, and actions, and to keep a strong guard where he finds himself most exposed to danger. And how is he to do this, unless he retires into his closet to examine his actions, and pray to the supreme Being to guard and protect him?

If ye will be followers of Christ, and those good men whose examples are recorded in scripture for our imitation, we must needs think ourselves under the highest obligation to pray in secret. And when we accustom ourselves to this, we shall obtain an habitual temper of devotion; so that whenever we catch ourselves in a fault, we shall naturally address our minds to God in a penitential ejaculation: and this we may do in company as well as in the closet.

As prayer is the life of religion, so short ejaculations are the life of prayer. And frequency of prayer requires that we should offer up short ejaculations to God. We have abundant instances of this sort in scripture, especially in the Book of Psalms. Holy David took occasion from almost every circumstance of life, to break out into pathetic starts of devotion, which kept his heart continually warm.

When he was in distress, he would comfort himself after this manner: *Why art thou cast down, O my soul; put thy trust in God.* Upon the receipt of any singular blessing he would say, *Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.* When he was in heaviness he would think upon God. When his heart was vexed, he would complain in some such words as these: *The sorrows of my heart, O God, are enlarged; O bring thou me out of all my troubles.* As soon as he was delivered from his troubles he would say, *Turn again, then, unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath sustained thee.* Every observation that occurred to his mind upon God, Nature, and himself, generated the most rapturous exclamations of praise and thanksgiving. The Publican smote upon his breast, and cried out, *God be merciful to me a sinner.* Our Saviour expressed himself in short petitions, making frequent stops and intermissions: *Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me, &c.* And again, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.* St. Stephen also, when he prayed for his murderers, said, *Lord Jesus receive my spirit: lay not this sin to their charge.*

From these instances, we see how necessary it is to call frequently upon God in short ejaculations. And let it be considered, that God regards the temper of the soul more than the length of a prayer: the short ejaculation of the Publican was more acceptable than the long prayer of the Pharisee.

Having, I think, made it appear that private prayer is a great Christian duty, I shall now,

Secondly, Shew that every governor of a family is bound to call every one of his household together, and offer up their joint prayers to God for his blessing and protection.

And this, because it is the duty of every Christian, let him be in what station soever, to promote piety and religion, the glory of God, and the welfare and happiness of his fellow-creatures. A king, as supreme; a clergyman, as the pastor of his parish; and a master, as the head of his family, are all, in their respective stations, God's stewards, and must give an account of their stewardship. It therefore highly becomes them to act with that integrity and uprightness which is justly expected of them by their great Lord and Master, who will most assuredly require the blood of such as perish through their neglect, at their hands.

Every family, then, must be considered as a little parish, and the governor of it (if I may so speak) a priest, who is as much obliged to watch over the spiritual welfare of those under his charge, as a minister of a parish is over those of his flock. *If any man provide not for his own*, saith St. Paul, *and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.* And I am sure he must deny the faith every day who neglects to provide for the spiritual welfare of his family, in not instructing them in the principles of religion, and calling them together every morning

and evening to implore God's blessing and protection.

How unbecoming a Christian must that man be, who can see his family disperse of an evening without any religion, and meet again of a morning, like the other animals about his house, only to be fed; and never think of making so much as the poor returns of a grateful heart for all the blessings he enjoys from his most gracious and bountiful Creator.

When this is the case, (and God knows it is too much the case) it is a sad indication of a latent infidelity, which, if not speedily rooted out, will, I am afraid, be the ruin of many families.

What a dreadful account must he expect will be required of him, by his Creator and Judge, who not only neglects his duty in this respect, but, by his bad example, encourages his wife, his children, and servants, to forget their Maker, and live without God in the world? Surely, every master of a family should lay this home to his serious consideration! But, alas! go into many houses, and, I am afraid, we may say as Abraham said to Abimelech, *Surely the fear of God is not in this place!* So far from finding any family worship, we shall find strife, contention, and animosity, prevail; so far from hearing the language of charity, that we may hear the reputation and good name of some one of our neighbours treated with cruel aspersion, and wicked calumny.

This is not to act like that devout man Cornelius, who feared God with all his house,

and prayed to God always. It is not following the example of Job, who, when the days of the feasting of his sons and daughters were gone about, offered burnt offerings, according to the number of them all, for fear that they might have committed some sin during the time of their mirth and jollity: and this he did not once or twice, but continually. Neither is it acting like Joshua, who declared, *that as for himself and his house, they would serve the Lord.* But it is acting (I cannot say like heathens: for they, even at this day, have their household Gods, and call upon them morning and evening, but) like persons who have no serious thoughts of God and religion, and, by the most monstrous ingratitude, declare themselves unworthy of his blessing and protection.

How is the blessing of God to be expected upon a family who have no thoughts of him? Is there not much greater reason to expect a curse?

What! though God sends his rain upon the just and on the unjust; grants many an ungrateful sinner an abundance of outward enjoyments, such as riches, honour, and pleasure; and delivers him from many calamities, and sustains him in bodily health, yet these enjoyments commonly prove a snare to him, by his abusing them to wicked purposes; and though, in this life, he may have his fill of worldly enjoyments, yet he may wish hereafter that he never had been rich, great, and prosperous; and find, to his unspeakable grief, that he has no portion allotted him in the kingdom of heaven!

Many imagine, that if they offer up their prayers to God in private, it is sufficient; but this is to act like a hermit, or one who shuts himself up in a cloister, and cares for none but himself. For though a man may be very exact in his own private devotions, and trust to each one of his family to do the like, yet he may be deceived; and if he is deceived, he will have no prayer at all in his family, at least none but his own. And though sin lies at the door of every one in his house, who neglects to pray in secret, yet it will be his fault that there is this neglect. And the miscarriages of many families, it may reasonably be presumed, proceed from this source: children grow undutiful, idle, and wicked; servants disobedient, guilty of eye service, as men pleasers, and not fearing God. The governor of the family looses that respect which is justly his due; and which, if he had kept up a sense of religion in his house, he would, in all probability, never have had reason to complain of. For, when children and servants are taught duty and disobedience for conscience sake, they will then chearfully act agreeable to their stations. And though after all endeavours to make children and servants religious, they should prove otherwise, he has the comfortable satisfaction to think he has done his duty; and that God, the righteous Judge, will reward him for it at last.

Besides, every family, as so many servants of God united under one head, have all some common sins to confess, some common blessings to ask, some common dangers to fear, and some

common mercies to give thanks for; it is therefore highly reasonable that the governor should call them together, as many as can be at leisure, twice a day, in the morning and in the evening; and, by himself, or some one of the family, confess their sins to God, offer up their prayers for what they want, and their thanksgivings for what they enjoy.

Gratitude and self-interest require this.

Gratitude for those common blessings which they enjoy from the best of Beings; for their existence, their health, their continual preservation, and, above all, for their redemption from sin and death, by the blood of Christ.

Self-interest also requires this.

For promoting family religion is the best means of promoting the temporal as well as the eternal welfare of the whole family; because *godliness has the promise of the life that now is, as well as that which is to come.* And, on the other hand, when it is neglected, we may reasonably expect, that God will, according to the prophet Jeremiah, *pour out his fury upon the families that call not upon his name.*

And not only the reasonableness of the duty, but the practice of our blessed Saviour, and the example of the primitive Christians, enforce it. We read that our Saviour was often alone praying with his disciples, who were then his little family. And the primitive Christians were so exemplary in this particular, that St. Paul, in his epistles, often styles the house of such families, a church: *Salute the brethren,* says he, *which are in Laodicea, and Nympas, and*

the church which is in his house, and in several other places.

I think I need say no more to convince you that family prayer is a Christian duty; I shall, therefore, proceed in the

Third place, To consider the objections that may be made to this duty.

And one may be, that as family prayer is now almost totally disused, at least by the generality of those who profess themselves to be members of the church of England, a man who attempted to introduce this in his family would be looked upon by his neighbours as a singular, precise fellow; and, perhaps, be branded with the name of a Methodist.

Now, as to the singularity of it, I am willing to hope, that it is not so singular as many imagine: I hope there are many families who make a conscience of performing this duty, and yet are no Methodists. Strange! that what has been universally acknowledged as fit and reasonable by the best and wisest of men, and enforced by the example of Christ, should, in these days, be thought an exercise only becoming a mad Enthusiast.

Surely, this is doing great honour to the cause of Methodism, and is a great reproach to us of the established church. What! cannot a man worship God in his family without being a Methodist? Surely he can. It only becomes a Methodist to assert such a thing; and too many of them, I am afraid, have too much cause to assert it.

However, if we will consider, we shall easily

be persuaded, that the disuse of family religion is as much chargeable upon every individual governor of a family as it is upon the generality; because every governor that omits it, contributes to make it so much the more gegeral, therefore has no reason to charge it upon his neighbours.

A man cannot be justified in his neglect of this duty, because he fears to be singular. Had Noah feared to be singular when God commanded him to build an ark for the preservation of his family, they must have perished in the deluge. Joshua did not fear to be singular, when he spoke the words in the text. *If*, saith he, *it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, chuse you this day whom you will serve, whether the Gods which your fathers served, that were on the other side of the flood, or the Gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.* And this resolution of his had that good effect upon the people, that they likewise unanimously agreed to serve the Lord. And were a few governors of families to follow the example of Joshua, they might also excite more to do so.

I am aware but of one more objection, and that is, that it interferes with our worldly business. "Men who are obliged to earn their bread with the sweat of their brows, must attend early to business, therefore cannot find time to pray with their families."

To this it may be answered, that though it may so happen that a man cannot attend his family of a morning, yet he may depute some

one in his house to perform this duty in his absence; and, in the evening, he can always be present himself when his work is done, which is never so late as to exclude family worship: and he will find more satisfaction in this than in spending his time at a public house, as is generally the case.

As to such as are not obliged to bodily labour, and gentlemen of fortune, our nobility, and such like great families, they are utterly inexcusable, and can by no means acquit themselves to their own consciences, or in the sight of God. Give me leave now, in the

Last place, To apply what has been said to your serious consideration.

Are you not all desirous of making a suitable provision for your children? Do not men, in general, strive to accumulate wealth, to give their children a good education, and set them up in the world? And should you not much more be careful to instruct them in the principles of religion? to give them an early sense of piety, and a just reverence of God? How monstrously inconsistent then is it to be continually anxious about their temporal prosperity, and, at the same time, neglect their better part, their precious and immortal souls? But when men do so, it shews that they have no true notion of religion themselves; for if they had, if the love of God were shed abroad in their own hearts, it would naturally lead them to do their utmost to provide for the spiritual welfare of others, and especially those of their own house.

We are apt to complain when our servants are unjust to us; and yet, who can be more unjust than those who, in return for their servants labours, take no care to provide for their inestimable souls?

The time will come when they shall know they ought to have given them some spiritual as well as temporal wages; and that if any of them are lost through the governor's neglect, he will most assuredly be called to an account for it.

The blessing of God upon our families; the good success of our honest endeavours in procuring a comfortable subsistence; and, above all, a peaceful conscience, and a glorious prospect of futurity, depend, in a great measure, upon family religion.

But if neither the favour of God, our temporal prosperity, nor the good of our children and servants, will have any effect upon us, perhaps the consideration of a future judgment at the bar of heaven, before which all must appear, may have some influence upon us. *We must all,* says the Apostle, *appear before the judgment seat of Christ; there to answer for the deeds done in the body, whether they be good, or whether they be evil.* If this be the case, (and no one can disprove it) how then will that servant, who was made ruler over his lord's household, and neglected to give them meat in due season, excuse himself beford his lord, when he comes? He may, perhaps, with the utmost horror and despair, behold the wife of his bosom, his children, who were his crown and

delight, and his servants, attributing their condemnation to his neglect and bad example: and then, what can he expect but to be cut in sunder, and his portion appointed him with the hypocrites.

Let these, and every other important consideration, have a due effect upon your minds: you will then, I am persuaded, be ready to say, in the words immediately following the text, *God forbid that we should forsake the Lord.* And again, *Nay, but we will, with our several households, serve the Lord.*

Now, unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy; to the only wise God our Saviour be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

SERMON VIII.

IN WHICH IS SET FORTH

THE

NATURE AND REASONABLENESS

OF

PUBLIC WORSHIP.

I TIMOTHY ii. 1.

I exhort, therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men.

THESE words evidently demonstrate, that St. Paul looked upon supplications and prayers, as a duty incumbent on mankind, arising from our dependance upon God as the giver and preserver of life, and from whom all the blessings we enjoy are derived.

I will, says the Apostle, *that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.* And this, he tells us, *is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who will have all men be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth.* And when we make truth the object of our minds, it will naturally dictate to us that there is a worship due to the supreme Governor of the Universe.

I shall, therefore, in consequence of the exhortation in my text, endeavour to prove,

First, That there is a worship due from the Creature to the Creator. And,

Secondly, I shall point out in what manner that worship is to be performed, so as to be likely to please God, and benefit ourselves.

First, I am to prove that there is a worship due from the Creature to the Creator. And this is evident from the practice of all nations in the world. There never was a nation that acknowledged a Deity but what had some method of paying him adoration; and, by proper dispositions of mind, by some exterior forms of worship, acknowledged his supremacy, adored his excellencies, and intreated his bounty and protection, as dependant, though unworthy objects. *All nations*, says holy David, *whom thou hast made, shall come and worship before thee, and shall glorify thy name; for thou art great and dost wondrous things: thou art God alone.*

But notwithstanding this general sense of mankind, this present age abounds with a set of men who entertain very loose sentiments with regard to the obligations of religion in general, and of Christianity in particular. "They tell you, that this custom of worshiping the Deity had its rise from fear and superstition; that designing men have represented the Almighty as a rigorous and severe sovereign, delighting in the miseries of his creatures; the ignorant and timerous multitude were scared into these devout and enthusiastic practices; which, say they, to thinking men, appear absurd and useless; since God, from his omniscience, must know the wants of his creatures, and from his goodness must be ready to supply

them, if they deserve it, without asking." In answer to this, if we consider how this custom of worshiping the Deity has prevailed in all ages, amongst persons of the greatest depravity of morals, as well as the most serious and considerate: amongst the wisest and most inquisitive, as well as the unthinking and credulous; it will be a fair presumption, if not a strong evidence, that reason gave birth to this practice, and not superstition, as these men affirm.

And as to the observation that God knows the wants of his creatures, and is always ready to relieve them, without being solicited, this may be granted; and yet it is no objection to the fitness and necessity of this practice, because it is suitable to the nature and condition of man, and the relation he stands in towards God. For, does not common gratitude require that we should express our thankfulness for all the blessings we enjoy from our most gracious and bountiful benefactor? Should we not glorify that best of Beings who gave us existence, who continually preserves us, and gives us every comfort of life? Surely we should. And, though our expressions of gratitude are of no advantage to him, yet he is highly pleased with them, and requires them of us, as it testifies our sense of his power and will to do for us beyond what we ask or think. For though our Creator might supply all our necessities without asking, yet it would be very great presumption in any one to expect that he will.

To make this familiar to our senses: suppose a man in want of the common necessaries of

life, and yet so proud as to be above acknowledging his wants; and so insolent as to despise and affront the person who should (though unsolicited) send him relief, what man is there amongst you that would pity or regard him? And shall the ungodly, who are so proud that they care not for God, expect that he will care for them? Reason tells us the contrary; not to remark, that Christ has told us, we must *ask before it will be given*, and must *knock before it will be opened unto us*.

Hence it is plain, that gratitude is a duty both of natural and revealed religion; and it is so acceptable both to God and man, that it is the ready way to obtain greater benefits from both; whereas ingratitude is so base, that it stops the current of favours for ever; for an ungrateful person renders himself unworthy of any more.

We see, then, that reason, gratitude, and the practice of all nations, prove that there is a worship due to the great Creator.

Besides, have we not the example of Christ himself, who has expressly told us, that it is our duty to follow his steps? Have we not the practice of Prophets and Apostles, who lived and acted continually under the immediate inspiration and direction of God? Have we not all these, I say, written for our instruction? And not only that, but we have express directions, both in the old and new Testament, for the duty of prayer.

Thus in the old Testament, *O thou that hearest prayer*, says holy David, *unto thee shall all flesh*

come. And in the prophecy of Ezekiel, when God had promised to do many things for his people, he tells them, *I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them.*

In the new Testament we meet with variety of the plainest precepts for this duty. In the xviii. chapter of St. Luke, our Saviour, by a parable, shews that men ought always to pray. In another place, he commands us to watch and pray. And it is St. Paul's desire that *supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men.*

One would think there was very little need to take either time or pains in proving that God ought to be worshipped. But the necessity of saying what I have said will evidently appear, when we consider that, with too much truth, it may be asserted, that in every community there are men to be found who glory in their ingratitude towards their God, from whom they hold life and all the blessings that attend it; and to whom they are more indebted for their being, than to their father and mother of whom they were born. But now, allowing that God ought to be worshipped, let us consider, in the

Second place, How that worship is to be performed, so as to please him, and benefit ourselves.

As God is to be worshipped, some method must be observed, and some day set apart for that purpose.

As to the method, St. Paul has laid it down

in my text: it must consist of *supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks*; all which include confession of our sins to God, supplication to him to avert any calamity, intercession for our fellow creatures, and thanksgiving for all the blessings we enjoy.

Thus the worship of God is divided into several branches, which, if it be done with propriety, regularity, and without perplexity, it will be acceptable to God, and beneficial to ourselves. And this must be done in a public and solemn assembly of the individuals of every community; for all societies of men, (as such) are as equally under the guardianship of Providence, as any single person who composes that society. They have (as a community) their dependancies, their miseries, and mercies; all which should, in social worship, be acknowledged. There are public sins, which demand public humiliation; and public blessings, for which there ought to be public thanksgivings.

But it may be said, perhaps, that if every individual will but take care of himself, by supplicating his own wants, and deprecating his own miseries, God will protect and bless him, though he paid no regard to public and solemn assemblies. It must be from a persuasion of this nature that so many neglect the public worship.

But I must tell you, that it is as necessary to unite in acts of piety, as in the support of justice, or the promotion of any common good; for, by this means, a general sense of our dependance upon God and dread of his displeasure,

is kept alive, which is the pillar of government, and the foundation of peace and regularity in the world. Let those who dispute this cast their eyes upon the several nations, or tribes of savages that are in the world, and see what anarchy and confusion prevail amongst them. And, without this method of serving God, we may naturally conclude, that in a short time we should lose all sight, all sense of a Deity, and that the ignorance and barbarity of Indians would prevail amongst us. But God forbid that ever such a misfortune should come to this kingdom, or to any nation who have received the light of the gospel! Blessed be God! there are many serious and thinking men, who are convinced of the necessity and great importance of public worship; who attend it regularly, and make a conscience of their duty, notwithstanding all the attacks of atheistical libertines.

But though men in general are convinced that public devotion is absolutely necessary, and of the utmost importance, yet they differ much in their opinions of the method of performing it; and when a young Christian beholds so many different sectaries, all of them tenacious of their own opinions, it is enough to stagger him in his notions of religion, and to create doubts in his mind what course to pursue. In this case, let him consider what true religion is. What does the Lord require of him? but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with his God. And to this let him add a firm and unshaken faith in the merits and satisfaction of

Christ. Then, if his devotions, whether public or private, be performed with decency and propriety, he need not doubt of being everlastingly rewarded in the kingdom of heaven.

No one can reasonably object to the solemn prayers and decent ceremonies of the church of England, which are so admirably contrived to excite dovotion in every pious mind.

Let the advocates for extempore prayers defend them if they can. We see, that notwithstanding the incoherency, tautology, and weakness of them, which evidently demonstrate that they are not the dictates of the holy Spirit, there are men credulous enough to look upon them as such; though, if they would but reflect, they must know that they do not pray themselves: their teachers pray indeed, but they only hear prayers in the very same manner as they hear the sermon. Now, as prayer is speaking or conversing with God, unless I speak to him myself; unless my own soul discourse with him, I cannot be said to pray. For no one can be so senseless as to imagine, that if I was in company with two persons who were discoursing together, and not utter a word to either of them, that I discoursed with them. And is it not strange that so groundless a conceit should ever enter into men's heads as that hearing another pray should be praying? Yet it is manifest, from daily experience, that the generality of mankind do think that they pray when they only hear another pray.

We have a form of prayer, and the congregation may, if they please, make themselves

perfectly acquainted with it before hand, and may join with the minister in every word, and, by that means, make both theirs and his a joint prayer. But a man that offers up an extempore prayer, or one of his own composing, only prays himself, and the minds of his hearers must be constantly employed to know what he is going to say, and judging of it; consequently, never can have time themselves, by the direction of their own minds to God, to offer up any part of his prayer; much less can the minister's and people's be a joint prayer, because he must have actually offered up every part of it before they can tell what he will say.

But notwithstanding that we have a most excellent liturgy, yet it is too visible that many in our churches do not pray. If we may judge from outward appearance, we may conclude that when people are gazing about them, whispering, lolling, or using any irreverent postures, that they do not direct their minds to God while the minister is repeating the words: and when they do not, they cannot be said to pray. A man may draw near to God with his lips, and his heart be far from him; his mind may be intent upon other things: and, when this is the case, it is downright mockery, consequently a very great sin.

As there can be no religion without mode or ceremony, so no pious Christian will neglect to comply with the decent ceremonies of the church, such as kneeling at prayers, and standing when we sing the praises of our great Creator. When people neglect to do this, it is no un-

charitable assertion to say, they have then no thoughts of God at all, at least, if they have, they are very loose and profane.

We see, then, that God is to be worshipped, and that not privately only, but in a public and social manner; and, according to St. Paul, it must be done decently, and in order. Some time, then, of course, must be consecrated and set apart for this purpose; and this, by general practice of Christians, is one day in seven. The Jews, by divine appointment, observed the seventh day, but that obligation terminated with the Hebrew nation; for Christ, after compleating the work of our redemption, by rising on the first day of the week, and afterwards by his miraculous mission of the Holy Ghost, on the first day of the week, which we this day commemorate; Christ, I say, by this means, has translated the religious observation of the seventh day to the first day of the week: and the moral obligations of the fourth commandment, with regard to the Jewish sabbath, are equally binding on that of the Christian.

On this day we are not to follow our occupations, but are to rest from our labours, not only ourselves, but our servants and our cattle; by which we shall observe the two incumbent obligations of piety and mercy. And what day can be so proper for Christians to assemble together and worship God as that on which their Redeemer rose from the dead? Since, on this glorious event, all their hopes, all their prospects, and the truth of their religion, depend.

Now, from what has been observed, this must be the natural conclusion, that to observe a stated form and time of worship, and to perform it with decency, is highly reasonable, because it keeps in our minds a constant sense of our dependance upon God, and the obligations we owe him. It is this which influences the conduct of a good man, and makes him set God always before him; whereas the wicked is so proud that he careth not for God, neither is God in all his thoughts: he neglects the means of grace, and by so doing, grows every day more loose in his notions of piety and virtue.

But a man that attends the public worship of God may, by the lectures which are there delivered, be put upon his guard against the dangerous snares of vice, which are laid open to the view of the unguarded and inconsiderate; virtue is exalted, vice exposed, and the duties of morality are enforced by the glorious sanctions of eternal happiness to the good, and everlasting misery to the wicked.

I know it is allowed on all hands, that public sermons are very useful and fit instructions for the vulgar and ignorant; but we are told that they are useless with respect to men of reason and reflection. That is, in plain English, they are of no service at all; for who is the man, if he may judge for himself, that will place himself in the class of the ignorant and thoughtless? I fear, if this were to be admitted as a sufficient plea of absence, we should have but a thin congregation; for people would stay at home to avoid being thought ignorant. But this plea of

vanity must not be admitted, because there is no man so deep read to whose memory some important truths may not be discovered; or, at least, represented in a light in which they were never considered; and, perhaps, in a light fairly adapted to their own tempers, and which, consequently, may lead them to good and worthy actions.

No man is so compleatly master of every subject, as that nothing new can be suggested to him, and as prejudice and prepossession are misfortunes that attend the most finished education, something in a studied discourse may be offered, if not immediately to enlarge his understanding, at least to put him upon a cool examination, by which his wrong bias may be removed.

However, after all, public lectures must be looked upon by far the less noble and sublime part of divine service, if it can be called any part of it all; though, by some sectaries, the sermon is thought to be the principal part of their public worship; at least, one would imagine so, since their whole service consists almost entirely of preaching.

But a judicious person will easily perceive that the whole design of public lectures is to persuade men, by proper arguments, to a constant attendance upon the public worship, and to every other Christian duty; therefore, to attend to a sermon, and, in a manner, neglect the prayers, is to confound the means with the end, which is a manifest absurdity.

Men should be careful, when they come into

the house of God, that it be with a design to worship him, and not only out of curiosity to hear a sermon, as I fear too many do. How many idle people are there, who seldom, or never, put their foot within side a church door, unless it be through a case of necessity? Is not all that corruption of morals which has overspread this kingdom, owing to the neglect of this important duty of social worship?

Many there are who, by this neglect, have blotted out of their minds all distinction between good and evil, and have commenced cool and deliberate libertines. They have so far debased their notions of religion as to look upon it as a duty that may be observed by the bye, when neither their pleasures nor their profits interfere. They have clouded their reason so far as to take a pleasure in deceiving themselves in those points that are of the highest consequence to them, as if the safest way to avoid a precipice was to run blind-fold by it. In their worldly concerns they are diffident and timerous; in their religious conduct they are rash and credulous; in worldly affairs they deliberately weigh every circumstance; in religion they are so far from thinking or reflecting, that they venture their immortal treasures upon occasional reflections.

These are the characters of such as regard not God, but make him only a secondary or subservient Deity, and sacrilegiously bestow upon sense and appetite that worship to which he alone has a claim.

To men of this stamp, all arguments drawn

from religion will prove useless and unavailing, and it will be next to an impossibility to make them entertain the most distant thought of a reformation, because they do not perceive their disorder, but rather approve of their conduct; and, unless our irregularities are clearly seen, and deeply lamented, we must for ever remain incurable.

Astonishing! that man, who boasts of his reason, should act so trifling and inconsiderate a part; should be so careless of his eternal concerns, not to say, bent upon his own destruction.

However, let us not all be thus inconsiderate, but rather let us be persuaded to act as becomes reasonable creatures, by a frequent and chearful discharge of this reasonable and important duty of social worship; and then we shall be better fitted to join (with transporting and ineffable delight) among the heavenly host, in singing eternal hallelujahs, under the smiles of our God and Redeemer. To whom be ascribed, &c.

SERMON IX.

ON THE

GOVERNING PROVIDENCE OF GOD,

PREACHED IN THE

ISLAND OF JAMAICA,

ON THE

Fast Day, appointed in Memory of the great Storm

WHICH HAPPENED THERE

On the 28th of August, 1712.

REVELATIONS xix. *part of the 6th and 7th.*

Hallelujah: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice.

IF we take a survey of mankind in the majority, we will find, that it is the universal opinion that this world was formed by an eternally existing Creator. And the reason is, because no man, in his senses, could ascribe that which hath all the characters of a wise design and contrivance imprinted on it, to the effect of blind chance, or the fortuitous concurrence of atoms.

But you will find many, in all ages, and of every religious persuasion, so perplexed about the good and evil accidents of life, as to doubt whether this Creator gives himself any concern in governing the world now he has made it. And yet, what can be more absurd, or more evidently display the short-sightedness of man? If there was no supreme intelligence, no providential eye over the universe, it must suffer infinite distractions, undergo numberless cala-

nities, and, before an age could pass, must have returned to its primitive chaos.

It must be granted, to be sure, that the same divine power that created all things in the beginning, might have commanded that they should continue in the same regularity and order to the end of time, without the continual interposition of Providence to support them. So indeed the Almighty, if he pleased, might still create man at full stature, as he did Adam: but, is it a reason because he could, that he ought to do so? He might have ordered the Garden of Eden to have produced all the necessaries of life, and to have retained its primitive verdure and prolific quality, without being cultivated by Adam: but, as it would have shared the fate of all gardens being neglected, which are always over-run with weeds, and unfit for use 'till dressed and cleansed, so it is with this glorious fabric of the world, and the infinite variety of creatures in the upper and lower regions: they are not preserved in their original splendour and beauty without a divine superintendant: no, they are governed and supported by a power and providence, admirable and stupendous.

Besides, how is it consistent with the attributes of power and goodness to be present in every place, where many wise momentous things are to be done, and yet do nothing at all?

Action is the glory of every being. Idleness and ease are marks of weakness and imperfection. And, if it be more majestic in an earthly prince to exercise his power daily in

doing good, rather than to stifle it in an inglorious indolence, surely it must be a sublime degree of goodness in the King of Kings to sit at the helm of this floating universe, and to steer its motions with a steady and unerring hand.

We may, with as great propriety, imagine a sun in the firmament without heat or light, as a living God surrounding and penetrating all things, without ever exerting his active powers, or shedding forth his vital influence upon them.

Life is an active principle; and as God is the fountain of life, is ever active, and is in all places, he must, of course, operate every where: and, if he operates every where, that operation is a universal Providence.

All nations of the world, says holy David, *shall remember and turn unto the Lord; and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee.* And he assigns a reason for their so doing; *for,* says he, *the kingdom is the Lord's; and he is the governor among the nations.* But to what purpose do they worship him, if the Lord is not present? Or, if he is present, if he will not act nor concern himself about the affairs of this world, it must be a vain and idle thing to offer up any prayers to him; consequently the whole race of mortals, excepting a few professed atheists, must be branded with folly and stupidity.

As for his being governor among the nations, a log might answer the purpose as well if he does not exert his attributes. For what doth that wisdom signify that contrives nothing?

or that power which performs nothing? or that goodness which is good for nothing? or that justice which distributes nothing? In short, that Deity who hath neither wisdom, power, goodness, nor justice; or, which is the same thing, who makes no manner of use of them, is no better than a dead and senseless idol, unworthy of the regard of a rational being.

But this general custom of prayer, which prevails in all nations, is a strong presumption, that there is a universal active mind which prompts mankind to rely upon and implore his protection: at least, it is a convincing proof that the world, in general, allows a divine Providence; and it was this religious persuasion that led the legislative body of this Island* to enact the solemn observance of this day.† And if atheists and infidels (by whom, I mean those who deny a revelation) will but consult Plato, Socrates, and many other heathen divines, upon this important point, they may, perhaps, be persuaded by those (though they despise the Christian who advises them) to lay aside their singularity, and to unite in the general opinion and practice.

But, as for those who are Christians, and who, I would hope, entirely make up the present congregation, I must observe, that next to the existence of God, and the veracity of his word, the belief of his real Providence enlarges the mind, and gives us a just apprehension of

* Jamaica. † 28 August.

that power by which we are daily surrounded and protected.

And, therefore, in the further prosecution of this subject, I shall endeavour to demonstrate as brief as possible, that angels and men, both good and evil, are under the peculiar government and controul of the Almighty: that the celestial luminaries, the sun, moon, and stars, are kept in their regular course and order by his infinite wisdom and power: that the earth, the air, and the seas, with all their stores and furnitures, are so far from being beneath his notice, that he often excites them to move and act to the astonishment and conviction of the most hardened of the sons of men.

In order to this, I shall have recourse to those sacred records which are the foundation of our faith, as they should be of our practice.

We have a great variety of beautiful hints and descriptions of God's universal rule in the holy scriptures, particularly in the Book of Psalms. *The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom ruleth over all. Bless the Lord all ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening to the voice of his word. Bless the Lord all ye his hosts, ye ministers that do his pleasure. Bless the Lord, all his works, in all places of his dominions.* But in the 148th Psalm we are called upon, in a most pathetic and elegant manner, to praise the Lord. There the glorious angels in the heights of heaven are called upon; together with the sun, moon, and stars of light: *The heaven of heavens, and*

waters that are above the heavens, dragons and all deeps: fire and hail, snow and vapours, storms and tempest: beasts and all cattle, creeping things and flying fowl: kings, princes, and judges of the earth: young men and maidens, old men and children, are excited to praise the Lord; whose glory is above the earth and heavens; who is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works; who fulfilleth the desire of them that fear him; will also hear their cry and will save them.

So that here is a general summons to the whole universe; and a particular encouragement to all the rational inhabitants thereof to pay their homage to their awful Maker and Governor.

It may not be improper to observe to you, that it has been, and is still the opinion of many learned and judicious men, that God disposes and conducts most of the remarkable events and occurrences of this lower world by the agency of invisible spirits.

Many of the ancient philosophers being at a loss to account for the origin of evil; through what contingency, necessity, or permission it first came; and being once come, should still continue in the world; have ascribed it to the clashing and alternately prevailing power of good and evil spirits; and this opinion is strongly supported in divers places of the sacred writings: for as to the good angels, they are expressly called the ministers of the Lord, that do his pleasure. And we have very early accounts of those glorious agents being employed

to serve or punish; to defend or destroy a good or perverse race of mortals.

An instance or two, in both respects, may suffice.

I would willingly avoid the least suspicion of trespassing upon the honour and chastity of the Christian religion, therefore shall decline taking notice of apparitions sent to particular persons on secret and special messages; because, it may be objected, that enthusiasm and superstition too frequently usurp the throne of reason; the one keeping the soul under the bondage of implicit faith; the other of fantastical fear. I shall, therefore, only remark where those divine messengers were sent on great and astonishing occasions.

As, first, it was an angel, at the command of the Lord, that *at midnight smote all the first born of the Egyptians; from the first born of Pharaoh that sat on the throne, unto the first born of the captive that was in the dungeon; and likewise all the first born of cattle.*

Again, when the Lord was offended at David for numbering the people, and was determined to punish him either with the famine, sword, or pestilence: after David had made choice of the pestilence, we are told, that God sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it; and as he was destroying, the Lord beheld and repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed, *'tis enough, stay now thine hand; and the angel of the Lord stood at the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. And David lift up his eyes, and saw the angel of the Lord stand between the*

earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched forth over Jerusalem.

It was an angel that guarded the passage of Eden after Adam and Eve were turned out for their transgression. And they were the same heavenly messengers who were sent to Lot, to acquaint him with the design of God to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. In short, numberless instances might be given, of the agency of good angels who are commissioned, by their glorious Lord, to transact many awful passages in the course of Providence. And it should be a great comfort to good men to reflect, that they are under the tuition and guardianship of these invisible friends from their entrance into the world 'till their arrival in glory. *Take heed,* says Christ, *that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.* They kindly watch over us night and day, sleeping or waking, at times and seasons that we are not aware of: for we are told that *the angel of the Lord encamped round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.* And at the close of this frail life, they give their faithful and friendly attendance on our dissolution, to conduct our naked spirits, through regions unknown to us, unto the heavenly mansions: for, *when Lazarus died, he was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom.*

And as there are good, so there are also evil angels moving to and fro upon the earth and the air, whose daily study is to annoy and ruin mankind.

The devil is called the prince of the power of the air; and we find, that having obtained leave of the Lord to afflict Job, one way among divers others that he took, was to raise a storm of wind, and send a violent gust from the wilderness, which smote the four corners of the house where the sons and daughters of Job were assembled, so that it fell and buried them in the ruins.

In a word, this world is a common theatre, where good and bad men, good and evil angels, act their respective parts according as they are permitted or restrained by the sovereign will and power of God. For whether good angels are directed, or evil angels permitted, to bring about the several incidents of life, yet still it is the Almighty Sovereign that either issues out the order, or grants the permission. Nor is it any diminution of his glory that such mighty things should be done by the angelic power; it rather redounds more to the honour of God that he hath made such creatures, and endowed them with faculties capable of producing such events.

But not only these aerial beings, but the celestial luminaries are under the dominion and direction of God; and of this the Lord gave a signal demonstration in the days of Joshua, when the sun and moon stood still and ceased for a time, to pursue the course set them by their awful Creator.

And, as the angels and heavenly orbs, so the globe of this earth, and the air that fills the vast space between us and the firmament, are under the divine influence and direction.

One instance may serve for all to give us satisfaction in this point; and that is the memorable deluge (whether partial or universal is not material) in the days of Noah, when God broke up the bounds of the sea, and opened the flood-gates of heaven to destroy a wicked race of men.

But Job gives us a most lofty and elegant description of the power and providence of the Creator. *He stretched out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing. He bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds, and the cloud is not rent under them. The pillars of heaven tremble, and are astonished at his reproof. Lo! these are parts of his ways, but how little a portion is heard of him? But the thunder of his power who can understand?* And, speaking after the manner of men, the Lord is represented as bringing the wind out of his treasuries, as if it had been laid up in store, only to be brought out upon some special occasions.

Thus have I laid before you God's active and permissive providence, as running through the whole universe, from the highest rank of beings to the lowest and meanest things that are therein.

Give me a little more of your patience and attention whilst I apply what has been said to the occasion of the present solemnity, whichis to commemorate an astonishing storm of wind which fell 54 years ago, on the morning of this day. It is not the design of this solemnity to represent the ruin and desolation that then threatened the inhabitants of

this Island;* or to fill your minds with that horror and amazement which made the stoutest hearts tremble; and, I dare say, caused many profligate wretches to pray unto the Lord, who were not used to call upon his name.

Such a representation is out of the power of art to describe; nothing can truly paint it to you but such another dreadful sight, which it is the design of this day to implore the Almighty to avert from us. May the Lord God hear our prayer, and grant that none of us may ever feel the dreadful power of such a tempestuous wind!

The observance is of great use to keep up a lively sense of such judgments upon our minds, which became the subject of reason, of cool thoughts, and wise consideration, when the terror of it was over.

Judgments (and such I call all calamities of this nature) could never make a lasting reformation in the world, were we concerned to remember them no longer than we feel the smart of them. And whenever they happen (whether the cause be natural or supernatural) the punishment is the same, and is attended with the same moral inferences or instructions.

Punishment ends with the smart, and puts an end to all whining and tragical complaints. But this alone is the discipline of fools and brutes. The instruction is for men, and is to last as long as memory, thought, and reason exist. What could this storm teach those who saw and felt it, which it doth not

* Jamaica.

teach a wise man still? And what thoughts and devout passions were proper then, which are not on this day a suitable expression and motive to our devotion? For is not God the same still? A just, a righteous Judge, who is angry with the wicked every day, though he does not every day bend his bow, and let fly his arrows?

Though he does not every day appear in his terrible majesty, riding upon the cherubims, and flying upon the wings of the wind. Yet, I think, one such example might serve us for some ages, without expecting or desiring to be led to our duty by a repetition of such dreadful terrors.

But I really believe that the intention of our lawgivers, in appointing these solemn assemblies, would be more effectually answered, were it not for a confused and uncertain kind of infidelity, which ascribes all such calamities to the disasters of nature, and leads men to be more intent upon the weapon than upon him that strikes. But Nature, taken in the abstract, is an expression for the Deity; and the course of Nature, as it is commonly called, means no more than the regularity of his works who made and governs all things. And whatever unintelligent natural causes may seem to effect, it is not, in reality, done by them at all, but by the providence of God.

That the sun runs its course every day is as strictly and properly the hand of God, as that it stood still at the desire of Joshua; and, therefore, if we must have Nature to be something different from the Ruler of the Universe, when-

ever we see earthquakes, storms, and floods, involve a whole community in one general ruin, we must not think that it is Nature working perversely or erroneously, but overpowered by a superior rival, and by the justly conquering force of another nature.

All natural causes are effects produced by the governing providence of the Supreme Being, who often causes his judgments to fall upon sinners, that they may thereby learn righteousness. Let not the libertine, then, depend so far upon his power and wealth, as to think they are able to shield him from the avenging arm of the Almighty; neither let him think that any darkness (even the shadow of death) can screen him from the all-seeing eye of God! And let all those who are projecting schemes of worldly wealth, adding house to house, and field to field, calling them by their own names, endeavouring thereby to perpetuate their memory, neglecting at the same time the weighty concerns of the soul: let such, I say, consider how easily a powerful God can bury them in their houses, or entomb them in that earth upon which they had fixed their hearts and names.

But to compare small things with great for a moment, let us consider, that if the storm of wind (which we now commemorate) was so dreadful as to fill all those who saw it with horror and astonishment, think how dreadful that scene must be, *when all things shall be dissolved; the heavens pass away with a great noise, and the elements melt with fervent heat, the earth, and the things that are therein, burnt up!* What horror

must seize the souls of sinners, when the archangel, with the trump of God, shall shake the whole creation; when they shall *call upon the rocks and mountains to fall upon them to hide them from the wrath of God, and the lamb!* Then they will see (alas too late!) their extreme folly and madness in trusting to the perishing enjoyments of a world, the fashion of which so soon passeth away.

But to a good man it is matter of great joy and comfort, that God is *gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness.* He delights much to display his glory in acts of goodness and bounty to his creatures.

Judgments are his strange work, which makes the signal execution of them so very rare and extraordinary. And the way to have them rare is not to forget them; to learn righteousness by the calamities of others; to fear and tremble before that God who is terrible in his anger, and has all the ministers of destruction at his command.

God grant that this, and every other day's humiliation of the well-disposed in this Island, may so effectually prevail upon the Almighty, that he may take the whole into his protection, for the sake of the few righteous that are amongst us. In the confident expectation of which, let us join with the Psalmist, first in turning to God; and then sing with him, *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble; therefore we need not fear though the earth be moved: and though the hills be carried into the midst of the sea. Amen.*

SERMON X.

SHEWING THE

DANGER OF INDULGING THAT SIN

TO WHICH

WE ARE MOST ADDICTED.

HEBREWS xii. *part of the 1st Verse.*

And the Sin which doth so easily beset us.

IN order to give you a clear light into the meaning of my text, I think it necessary to observe to you, that in the foregoing chapter, St. Paul having recited a number of examples eminent for fortitude and constancy, who (as he tells us) *by their faith subdued kingdoms, turned armies to flight; stopped the mouths of lions; endured cruel mockings and scourgings; and wandered about in deserts and mountains, clad in the skins of sheep and goats; of whom the world was not worthy; and for whom God had prepared a city. Let us,* says the Apostle, *seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses; let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.* A scheme of speech that plainly alludes to the exercises of the ancients, wherein wrestling and other feats of manhood were performed. The metaphor is obvious upon the slightest inspection.

Let us lay aside not only every weight that sits heavy upon and oppresses us, but also the sin which, like a long garment, hangs about the affections, and entangles our feet in running the race that is set before us.

Those sins which promise us profit or pleasure are, of all others, the most likely to prove the greatest impediment in our Christian race; those, of all others, hang about us with the most cleaving fondness; those, of all others, are put off with the sorest reluctance.

The Apostle therefore does, in a particular manner, alarm our caution against these. He would have us beware, more especially, of that sin which brings the strongest temptation with it; which, perhaps, by long acquaintance and familiarity, has got the ascendant over us; and is *the sin which does so easily beset us.* From which words, I shall make the following observations.

First, I shall observe, that every man is addicted to some peculiar lust; has his beloved *sin which doth so easily beset him.*

Secondly, I shall shew the danger of indulging this lust. And, after making such useful reflections as the discourse shall naturally lead me to, shall close all, by enforcing the Apostle's exhortation; that so we may be persuaded to lay aside *the sin which doth so easily beset us.*

First, then, I am to observe that every man is addicted to some peculiar lust; has his beloved *sin which doth so easily beset him.*

The great end designed by religion, and that which has long been aimed at by the philoso-

phers, is to frame and fashion us into rational creatures; to make us men, and to teach us to act and live agreeable to our natures, by exalting reason into the throne, and rescuing the mind (that noble governing part of us) from the base and slavish tyranny of the flesh.

But when may we hope to see this excellent design in any tolerable degree accomplished? Is there room to compliment human nature upon any improvement, or advance towards perfection? Is it not sunk deeper into that degeneracy and corruption, which of old was so passionately complained of and lamented?

Wickedness and folly are of our constitution. Could we discover any one without this alloy, free from all impurity, with the image of God fresh and entire upon his soul; we must conclude him to be some other creature, not man. For who can say, I have made my heart clean? I am pure from my sin? *In many things we offend all. There is none that doth good and sinneth not.* This is a melancholy truth indeed; a truth of which every one carries a testimony in his own breast.

So it is; the very best of men are compassed about with infirmities; Paul and Barnabas declare themselves to be men of like passions with those at Lystra. And to convince us that they were indeed men of like passions, in the very next chapter we read with what violence they broke out against one another; *the contention* (says the text) *was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder the one from the other.*

St. Peter's denial of Christ is also an instance of our infirmity, and is therefore interwoven with the thread of our Saviour's sufferings, as a caution to us to beware of too much confidence in our own goodness.

Good use is to be made of the bad examples upon record in the holy scriptures; these things also are written for our admonition. There we read of the accomplished king of Israel, the man after God's own heart, whose character is made up of meekness and courage, wisdom and piety; and yet he buried all those glories in his neighbour's bed, and fixed a deep and indelible stain upon his honour with the blood of the innocent Uriah. So impotent, so frail a thing is man. One fleshly lust prevailing, throws down the tottering fabric of all his virtues. And what shall we do if such great men as these fall? If the cedars be shaken, how shall the reeds and bullrushes of religion stand?

Thus you see, that there is no mortal without sin; and in different men, different sins prevail. For instance, we find Cain stigmatized in scripture for murder: Simeon and Levi for treachery: Corah and his associates for profaneness and rebellion; Nebuchadnezzar's pride: the cruelty of Manasah: the covetousness of Balaam: the perfidy of Judas, are set forth for examples. And whosoever shall diligently observe to what point his desires lean; what his affections are most warmly provoked by; what thoughts spring up of themselves in his mind; what imaginations find the most

welcome entertainment in his breast; what objects affect him with delight, and immediately inflame his passions; I say, whosoever shall thus inspect into himself, will easily discover his darling lust; or, in the words of my text, *the sin which doth so easily beset him.*

I presume there is not one but carries about him plentiful matter of these temptations, which he must not expect to be free from 'till this corruptible shall have put on incorruption. But then, wicked thoughts (though continually obtruding themselves, if not consented to) are so far, I believe and hope, from being evil, that they are the exercise of our virtue, whose business is to check and repel them. Utterly to exclude and bar the door of our hearts against them is beyond the measure of flesh and blood, consequently not required of us. So that the difference between one man and another, in this respect, lies not herein, that the bad are subject to these lustings and the good exempted from them. Both are strongly plied with temptations adapted to their respectively prevailing lusts; but whilst the bad man is gently carried down the stream of his vicious inclinations, the good man tugs and rows with all his might against it.

'Tis matter of common observation, that the devil is daily watching to take advantage of us; suiting his temptations to the different tempers and circumstances of men; applying himself to the governing passions by the grateful objects of them. These are the feeble parts of our nature, and therefore the most advantageous

landing port of our spiritual enemy; here he finds us ready and disposed to receive him; our hearts are open, and our affections bid him welcome.

It were heartily to be wished that we were as careful to defeat his attempts, as we are not ignorant of his devices. But it goes against us to kill and crucify our beloved lust, which courts us with such bewitching tenders of satisfaction. To cut off the right hand, and pluck out the right eye (in a literal sense) is not a greater violence to nature. But, dear as our favourite sin is, I must proceed in the

Second place, To shew the extreme danger of indulging this our beloved lust.

Virtue has ever been esteemed a steady, constant, and uniform principle. Therefore, St. James tells us, that *whosoever shall offend in one point* (*i. e.* knowingly, wilfully, habitually offend) *is guilty of all.* Could a man, indeed, carry his obedience so far as to sin but in one point, (which is the case supposed by St. James) yet so long as he harbours one darling bosom vice, in hopes that the Lord will pardon him in this thing, *all his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned; but in the trespass that he hath trespassed, and in the sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die.*

'Till our duty comes in competition with some valuable interest, or prevailing passion, we cannot take the measure of it. But where our interest or pleasure stand in competition with our duty, how is every the most base and wretched thing preferred before Christ? How-

often do we determine, as the Jews did heretofore, *not this man but Barabbas?* Such was the policy of the Gadarenes, who, for fear of losing their swine, besought Jesus that he would depart out of their coasts.

Is the sin (preferred before Christ) dear and useful as the right hand? Why, it is no extraordinary thing, when the right hand is likely to corrupt the whole body, to cut it off and cast it from us, that we may preserve the maimed trunk, and die a little later. And is this severity not to be borne in order to save the soul, and secure it from the danger of infernal punishment? This is certain, to enjoy the present satisfaction of sin, and yet to escape damnation, are two things utterly inconsistent, and according to the word of God, impossible.

St. Paul has enumerated the several sins which exclude from the kingdom of God. *Be not deceived*, says he, *neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.* It is not necessary, it seems, in order to the attainment of damnation, that we add to our intemperance, uncleanness; to uncleanness, idolatory; to idolatory, extortion; to extortion, envy, and the like; and so to complete the body of sin in all its parts: one beloved lust will supply the want of all the rest; and as surely bring to the same end, as if a multitude of other sins were called in to its assistance. So one

mortal stab will effectually kill the body, without mangling every limb. I would not be understood here to mean accidental failings or surprize, or even some deliberate and wilful acts of sin. But this I say, every beloved lust heartily espoused, indulged, and continued in, will defeat all our hopes of entering into the kingdom of heaven.

The gospel covenant has treasures of mercy for those who have not obeyed the law in the strictness of unerring obedience. Evangelical righteousness shall be accepted where the legal is not to be had; but then we must take care to make honest and punctual payment of the evangelical.

Seeing, then, the best of men are surrounded with infirmities, which they can no more part with than they can shake off their flesh, can it be matter of wonder to any Christian, if he find himself not only tempted to evil, but incessantly urged and stimulated to the commission of it? Or need he, as not knowing the cause of his inward struggle between inclination and duty, enquire with St. Paul how it comes to pass that *he sees a law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin?* This is a case far from being new or uncommon. The utmost man can pretend to, is not to fall totally and finally. But to get above temptations, out of the reach of the allurements of sense is (as I said just now) beyond the measure of flesh and blood. What then, shall we lay down in sloth, complaining of our weakness, but use no

endeavours of recovery? Or, shall we charge the blame upon God the author of Nature? No, he made us upright; depravity and corruption are the work of our own hands.

Still, at the worst, our case is not desperate; nor are we sunk into a total degeneracy. Though our inclinations to vice are strong, yet it is our fault if we are enslaved by them.

To swim against the current of impetuous desires, and to turn Nature from its bent, it must be confessed, are no easy undertakings, not to be effected with cold wishes and lazy hands. But a vigorous resolution will do the business. Old sturdy habits will give way to it, much more will it prevail to check our vicious inclinations, and stop their growth into habits.

Let us then search and examine in which of our affections we stand most exposed to temptation; which passions give the most frequent alarm to our virtue; and what is *the sin that doth so easily beset us*. Here lies our greatest danger; here then let us post our whole strength, and implore the assistance of heaven to protect and defend us. Let us not (in the Apostle's phrase) beat the air, but single out our favourite bosom lust, and let us level all our arrows against it. Let us go out, therefore, against Satan, as David did against the Philistine, in the name of the Lord; and let us cut off the head of our spiritual Goliah, and make an offering of it worthy of God. This is a sacrifice resembling, by a faint similitude, that of Abraham when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar. Take

notice how highly God was pleased with this noble act of faith and obedience. *Now I know*, says he, *that thou fearest God; and, by myself have I sworn, that because thou hast done this thing, in blessing I will bless thee.* A declaration which we may be bold, in some measure, to extend to all who, at the command of God, are ready to give up what is most dear and precious to them, and so shall entitle themselves to the character of Abraham's children, who is the father of the faithful.

But, alas! how few copies are to be found of this fair original! Every darling lust is dearer to us than Isaac was to his father Abraham, and we strive not to conquer the evil affections of our nature.

Let us weigh the danger against the enjoyment.

If the sin be pleasant, yet it is not so to be in hell. Is it profitable? But will it countervail the loss of heaven? Shall we accept of such base momentary satisfactions in exchange for our immortal souls? Far be it from us to be deluded into so foolish a choice!

If, therefore, we are in earnest, and indeed resolved to mortify and kill our beloved lust, let us pinch and starve it by degrees; add no fuel to the flame, but cut off all occasions that may give advantage to the sin which doth already but too easily beset us. Let us be frequent and assiduous in the exercise of that grace which is most opposite to our darling lust; and so, by degrees, nourish a virtuous habit, in order to root out and supplant its

contrary. Above all, *watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation*, nor fall under it.

Simon, sleepest thou in this article of danger? Judas doth not sleep. The emissaries of Satan are up and busy, ready to betray and apprehend us. Watch, therefore, and pray, and assure yourselves that your prayers shall not return unto you void, but shall accomplish your desires and prosper in the thing whereunto you send them.

Let us begin, therefore, and go on in the power of faith, of watchfulness, and prayer; nor be discouraged at our frequent backslidings, and manifold failings, in the conquest of our beloved sin; *the sin which doth so easily beset us.* Allowance, 'tis to be hoped, will be made by that God who *knoweth whereof we are made*, and *remembereth that we are but dust.* But let us not go back, much less quit the field. God will at last give us the desired success; grace and peace here, and eternal happiness hereafter.

Let us, then, my brethren, constantly implore the Divine assistance to guard and protect us in every station of life; that his grace may always prevent and follow us; and make us continually to be given to all good works.

I conclude with that most earnest and passionate wish of St. Peter. *The God of all grace, who hath called us to his eternal glory by Jesus Christ, after that ye have suffered awhile,* (struggling and maintaining a doubtful fight against your spiritual enemy) *make you perfect, strengthen, stablish, settle you.*

And now, O thou eternal, inexhaustible fountain of all goodness! Thou Father and

Friend of mankind! Hear the prayers of thy humble servants, and grant us grace to withstand the *temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and with pure hearts and minds to follow thee, the only God, through Jesus Christ our Lord:* to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all honour, glory, and power, now and for evermore. Amen.

SERMON XI.

THE

GREAT IMPORTANCE

OF

INTEGRITY OF LIFE,

IN ORDER TO

MAN's HAPPINESS.

JOB xxvii. *5th and 6th.*

'Till I die, I will not remove my integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.

JOB makes a resolution here of maintaining an unprejudiced mind, and keeping a conscience void of offence: he is resolved to behave himself prudently, and not to be guilty of any thing that would either sting his conscience, or wound his reputation, were it to be exposed to human knowledge.

And this resolution he takes in the height of adversity and disgrace; when his wealth and children were snatched away from him; when his servants and friends despised him; when he was afflicted with pains and ulcers, and had no place to lay his head. In the midst of this unhappy change of things it was, that this good man resolved to remain unmoveable, unshaken, to keep his ground even until death. For *'till I die*, says he, *I will not remove my integrity from me.*

As if he had said, "Though it be my hard fate and the determined will of heaven, (which he knew he could not fathom) that I should be thus severely dealt with all my life; yet my chief care and study shall be to maintain an unprejudiced mind: not to repine under the dispensation of heaven, nor to be guilty of any thing that would offend my God, or lay me open to human censure.

Here is a pattern worthy of the imitation of all mankind! for it should be every man's care to carry such a temper of mind with him out of this world as may procure and improve his happiness in the next. Neither the prospect of wealth or honour should prompt him to the commission of any thing that is unjust: but in the whole course of his actions, and above every other blessing, he should value and prefer a good conscience; and (though in the height of misery and distress) he should renounce all external advantages, rather than forfeit so invaluable a blessing. And now that I may enforce this upon your minds, I shall, from these words of Job, take occasion, in the

First place, To lay before you the great importance of integrity of life, with respect to man's present happiness in this world.

Secondly with regard to his eternal happiness in the world to come.

Thirdly, I shall shew, that by the grace of God, every man may (like Job) hold fast his integrity, if he will use his endeavours to do so.

Fourthly and lastly, I shall conclude with an exhortation, that you may be persuaded to hold fast your integrity to the end.

I am, in the first place, to lay before you the great importance of integrity of life, with respect to man's present happiness in this world.

And this will very soon appear if we consider that none of the riches, honours, nor pleasures of this world, can afford happiness to a man who is attended with an evil conscience; for let him go where he will, and do what he can, still he is attended with disquietude and anxiety of mind. Is he rich and prosperous? He can never enjoy his riches with satisfaction, nor his prosperity with pleasure. Is he in an honourable post, and attended with crouds of admirers? All this will not appease the stings of a wounded spirit. Perhaps he stifles the alarms of conscience with a continued round of sensual pleasures; at balls and feasts, in drinking and carousing, and every other fashionable amusement. But, alas! what will this avail in the day of adversity, or at the hour of death? What has he to support him, if he should be brought to the calamity of an adverse fortune? He has not the integrity of Job to befriend him. And, when he has a vast eternity in view, and feels himself sinking into the gloomy regions of darkness, how must the dire forebodings of his guilty soul make him tremble and quake, in expectation of meeting with the just reward of his actions?

It is impossible for me, or any one upon earth, to describe the agonies of conscience at

that hour, when the disconsolate sinner is brought to reflect upon an ill spent life.

But when a man, like Job, gives his heart no room to reproach him, and is determined to hold fast his integrity, he is prepared for all events of Providence.

If he is rich and honourable, he enjoys his riches with comfort and satisfaction, and his virtue gives a lustre and dignity to his high station. And though he has the opportunity of enjoying the pleasures of life as well as other men, yet he uses the good things of this world without abusing them. He is ever ready to adore his Creator, and perform all possible acts of kindness to his fellow creatures.

The integrity of his heart leads him (after the example of holy Job) to compassionate the distresses of the poor. *He will not withhold from them their desire, but the fatherless shall partake of his bounty; neither will he suffer the poor to perish for want of cloathing, nor the stranger to lodge in the streets, nor the traveller to go without refreshment.* By this he is a comfort to himself, a blessing to his family, and a friend to all mankind. And if he should happen to meet with adversity and affliction, he is resigned to the will of his Creator, and comforts himself with having acted uprightly.

For let it be considered, that no outward calamity can disturb that man who is attended with a peaceable conscience, which is perpetually echoing to him those comfortable words of *well done thou good and faithful servant:* thou hast acquitted thyself as becomes a disciple of

the Saviour of mankind; like him thou hast manfully resisted temptations, and courageously bid defiance to the frowns and to the flatteries of the world and the devil.

Happy, unspeakably happy, is the man that is in such a case; he has no need of company to replenish his mind and relax his thoughts; nor need he have recourse to drink to heal the wounds and drive away the stings of an offending soul: for he is always carressed, always attended with the pleasing reflections of a well spent life.

This was the consolation of Job during his adversity, under a most dismal and shocking change of things; when the world (that but a few hours before smiled upon him) seemed now to be bent upon his eternal ruin.

He found, upon a review of his life past, that he had walked uprightly with his God; that neither his wealth, nor strength of constitution, (which are great temptations) had led him to affront his Maker; and though (for reasons best known to the eternal Governor of the world) he was driven from the height of prosperity to the depth of affliction, yet thus did he comfort himself: *My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go; my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.*

Integrity of life yields a man the most solid and lasting peace and satisfaction, and is his friend in the greatest time of need. When he falls, like Job, into any great calamity, his greatest support is that of a good conscience; when he can apply those comfortable words,

of St. Paul to himself, that *in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, he has had his conversation in the world;* then all will be calm and serene within; the black clouds of melancholy and despair will be dispersed, and a bright sunshine will ensue.

Amidst the greatest storm of adversity, a peaceable conscience spreads an inexpressible calmness over the mind; a serenity of temper refreshes and smooths it; every rising murmur is hushed, every repining thought quashed, and all the passions of the soul brought to an entire resignation to the will of Providence. And at the hour of death, how unspeakably reviving must it be to the drooping spirit to reflect upon a well spent life; to think that when this earthly tabernacle is dissolved, the soul will be received by the blessed Jesus into the blissful regions above.

It was a great comfort to St. Paul, when the the time of his departure was at hand, that he could with confidence say, *I have finished my course with satisfaction; I have kept the faith in integrity of heart; and now I am ready to depart and be with Christ my righteous Judge, who hath laid up for me a crown of righteousness.* What joy, what satisfaction can equal this? And may not this happy disposition of mind be attained by giving our hearts no room to reproach us? Yes, surely. This will be the happiness of every faithful follower of Christ, who hath, like Job, retained his integrity to that awful decisive hour, when he shall pass from

this transitory life to an endless eternity. He will then feel the unspeakable satisfaction of a well spent life, which will stand him in more stead than all the riches, and honours, and pleasures of this world. And this leads me, in the

Second place, To shew, that integrity of life is of the utmost importance with regard to our eternal happiness.

And this is very evident to any one that is acquainted with the Christian religion, which teaches us, that *without holiness no man shall see the Lord.* For as heaven is a state of uninterrupted felicity, no evil thing can be admitted there, because that would be an interruption to the happiness of its blessed inhabitants; and as sin is the worst of evils, it of course can have no place in heaven: therefore, it nearly concerns every intelligent being to divest himself as much as possible of all impurity while he is in this life, that he may be the better prepared for the happiness of the next.

And how is he to do this, but by performing the conditions of the gospel? And they are repentance towards God, faith in the merits and satisfaction of the blessed Jesus, and a sincere obedience to the eternal law of truth and righteousness. *Except we repent,* Christ tells us, *we shall all perish. Whosoever believeth in him* (*i. e.* Jesus Christ) *shall receive remission of his sins.* And, *Blessed are they who do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life.* These being the conditions by which we are to obtain eternal happiness, we must be

careful not only to resolve to observe them, but we must bring those good resolutions into action.

But men, in general, forget the obligations of Christianity, and seldom think seriously 'till they are thrown upon a bed of sickness. And how often do we see men who, upon their sick beds, have bound themselves under an obligation to become good Christians, if Providence should spare them their life; yet, as soon as they have been able to relish a pleasing, or to comply with a suitable temptation, they have basely renounced their promise, and sold their innocence for a trifle.

But we must take it for granted, that guilt can never be blotted out but by such a repentance as will produce a virtuous life; for no vice can be pardoned 'till it is mortified; and he who sees the error of his ways, resolves and prays against it, and yet still goes on in his wickedness, contradicts his own purposes and petitions, and all he gains by it is, that he is condemned; and he may, with as much reason, wish for life, whilst he cuts his throat, as pray his soul into heaven, whilst his morals are wicked.

If religion consisted in making fair promises, there would be but very few irreligious men; for, now and then, a man may be seriously disposed, and, without much difficulty, might promise a reformation hereafter. But this is not laying the axe to the root of the tree; for the lusts must be mortified, the passions subdued, and the flesh brought in subjection to

the spirit: without this, all religion is vain, and external pretences are of no significancy. *If thon vowest a vow to God, defer not to pay it,* (says the preacher) *for he hath no pleasure in fools.*

Our conversion is dated from the time that our lusts are mortified, our minds changed, and our appetites subdued. For to resolve and not to practice, betrays a hasty, rash, and injudicious mind, that considers not what he says, as well as intends not what he promises; and he that imagines himself in a happy condition, because he (now and then in distress) promises amendment, is miserably deceived, and will find to his cost, that *without holiness no man shall see the Lord.*

For when we shall be roused from the sleep of death, to appear before the great tribunal of Christ, it will be no service to us to plead, that we many times resolved to do well; for nothing will do then but virtuous actions; and we shall stand or fall in the next life, as we have behaved ourselves in this; according to that saying of the Apostle, *We shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, every man to receive according to the deeds done in the body, whether they be good, or whether they be evil.*

And since this is the case, *what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness?* How careful should we be to maintain our integrity, hold fast our righteousness, and give our hearts no room to reproach us.

The day that will determine our fate is hourly approaching us; and as every moment

of our lives is a step to the grave, where there is no work, no device, no repentance, we should set about subduing our lusts, and maintaining a conscience void of offence towards God.

To postpone this 'till to-morrow is dangerous; it is a danger too great to admit of any delay; for we know not what a day may bring forth; and whilst we are speaking peace to ourselves we may be alarmed with a summons into another world, and be brought before the dreadful tribunal loaded with guilt.

Alas! too many, 'tis to be feared, are now, like Dives, tormented in flames, who had deviated from the paths of righteousness, and went astray in the broad road of sin and wickednes? Had they, like holy Job, retained their integrity, and given their hearts no room to reproach them, they had never had reason to deplore their wretched condition in a state of misery.

And that it is in the power of every man, by the grace of God, to hold fast his integrity, is what I am now to make appear under my

Third general head. And such is our happiness, that though our grand enemy has power to tempt us, yet he cannot oblige us to sin; he lays the bait, but cannot compel us to swallow it: for he tempted our Saviour to worship him, with the pleasing prospect of all the kingdoms in the world, and a promise that he should be master of them, but he was rejected with scorn and disdain. He made use of many an argument to draw Job from his integrity, but

missed his aim. He tempted Joseph by the power of a lustful woman, but could not prevail. From whence it is plain, that if we forfeit our innocence, the blame lies at our own door.

We might, if we pleased, have been deaf to his arguments, and rejected his temptations, with that inimitable argument that Joseph made use of; for, said he, *How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?* We might stem the current of our evil inclinations within, and manfully reject the baits that are laid for us without, and, as Job did, maintain our integrity, hold fast our righteousness, and give our hearts no room to reproach us.

Job was sensible of the depravity of mankind. He knew their passions were irregular, their wills stubborn, and their lusts predominant. He knew also that the devil (knowing the hopeful condition of man, that if he behaves himself well here, is capable of being happy hereafter) was envious of him, and was his bitter enemy. He had experienced the arts which that accursed fiend has recourse to, in order to draw mankind from their innocency, and make them like himself, miserable to all eternity. For he saw that he inveigled the voluptuous into his snare, by the fair and flattering promises of delight; that he had gold to enchant the covetous, kingdoms to allure the ambitious, tinsil to dazzle the gay, and flattery to work upon the proud. And knowing these things, he bravely resisted temptations, and, by the grace of God, overcame them; he gloriously

supported his integrity, and therefore was, in the end, blessed with more abundance than he ever possessed before; and died in a good old age, full of days, and in favour with God and man. And is not this a powerful inducement to us to act like Job, and bravely withstand our spiritual enemy? What should hinder, but that we may, as he did, maintain our righteousness, hold fast our integrity, and give our hearts no room to reproach us.

The devil, it is true, consults the passions of mankind, and lays his baits suitable to them. He knew Cain to be envious and proud, and so induced him to imbrue his hands in his brother's blood. He found Peter to be cowardly, and so prompted him to deny his master. Judas he perceived to be covetous, and by that means led him to betray the Saviour of the world. These are the methods he has recourse to, in order to make men as miserable as himself. But notwithstanding this, we may, if we please, resist his temptations, and baffle all his evil designs.

If we ply constantly at the Throne of Grace, and implore the Divine protection, we need not doubt but that the kind Father of mankind will give us such a measure of his grace and holy Spirit, as may enable us to withstand all the temptations of our spiritual enemy.

But, alas! the contrary too often prevails. Men are seldom upon their guard, and are so far from resisting the solicitations of the tempter, that they readily suffer themselves to be led captive by him at his will, and seem resolutely

bent upon their own ruin. And though they know that a virtuous and good life is indispensibly necessary to salvation, yet they live in wilful impieties, and indulge themselves in gross and confessed wickedness; some of them wallowing in lust and wantonness, others in drunkenness and debauchery; some gratifying their pride and ambition, others their envy and malice; some sacrificing to their filth and luxury, others to their avarice and covetousness: and how can such people look into their breasts without the deepst horror and despair? But, indeed, they fly from their angry consciences as much as possible, and seldom think of amendment 'till they are either worn out with the long pursuit after a debauched life, or 'till they are suddenly seized with a dangerous fit of sickness. The unhappy condition, therefore, of such men, makes it the more necessary for me, as was proposed, in the

Last place, To exhort you, in the name of God, to hold fast your integrity to the end.

But surely, one would imagine, there is but little need for many arguments to press us to such a necessary duty, when our souls are at stake; whose present and eternal happiness or misery depends upon our good or bad management of them; and, if we lose them, we lose our all, and shall have no possibility of recovering them.

What? Is not the comfortable satisfaction which flows from an honest and good heart preferable to the stings of a wounded spirit, the inseperable companion of vice and wickedness?

Is not the death of the righteous to be chosen before the miserable end of an abandoned sinner? I believe all of us will readily subscribe to the wish of Balaam: *Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!* But, if ever we expect this, we must be careful to live as becometh the gospel of Christ. Like Job, we must hold fast our righteousness, retain our integrity, aud give our hearts no room to reproach us.

I most heartily wish that we would all consider how some men now do, and we ourselves shall hereafter tremble at the thoughts of such folly; when at the hour of death we shall think on the equal distribution of things at the day of judgment. For this is not a fictitious, but a real event, towards which all wise men look forward; lest, like the rich fool in the gospel, (who laid up provision for many years) they should be surprised by these words: *Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee.*

It is a most melancholy reflection to think of the inconsideration of some men; who, though they know that they must certainly die, and afterwards appear at the great tribunal, yet never consider what will become of them there, when they hear that dreadful sentence pronounced by the Judge of all the earth: *Depart from me, for I know you not, ye workers of iniquity.* What horror and amazement must then seize upon the condemned sinner, when he finds himself carried away to a gloomy prison of exquisite torture, there to remain to all eternity.

Alas! he will then (when it is too late) be convinced of his folly and madness, and *call to the mountains and rocks to fall on him, and hide him from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the lamb: For when the great day of his wrath is come, who,* or where is that impertinent sinner that *shall be able to stand in his presence?*

Be persuaded then, my brethren, to consider these things in time, and reflect seriously to which of these two fates, happiness or misery, your present course of life tends to bring you. Such a time will certainly come, and nothing will be of service to you then but the answer of a good conscience; that you have manfully resisted the strongest temptations, been patient under afflictions and disappointments, and resolutely stemmed the tide of your evil inclinations; that you have retained your integrity as long as you lived, and gave your hearts and consciences no room to reproach you. Then you will triumph for ever with the glorious company of the Apostles, the goodly fellowship of the Prophets, and the noble army of Martyrs, and all the saints and servants of God. And Oh! what heart can conceive, what tongue can express the inconceivable joy and happiness which the righteous man shall possess in the presence and enjoyment of that God, in whom *is all fullness of joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*

Let me, therefore, my brethren, to conclude, exhort you by all means to keep in mind the unspeakable reward of a virtuous and good

life. Let heaven and happiness, which deserve all your care, engross it principally before every other thing; there let us place our treasure, and there will be our hearts. And let every man of us take up the resolution of Job, and with him say, *'Till I die, I will not remove my integrity from me, my righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.* That we may all think of these things, and steadily adhere to the most admirable precepts of the gospel, all the days of our short stay upon earth, let us humbly beseech the Almighty to bestow upon us such a portion of his holy Spirit as may support us in all dangers and difficulties, that we may thereby be enabled to hold fast our integrity to the end; which (through the merits of our blessed Saviour) will not fail to bring us to the happy regions of the blessed. Now to God the Father, &c.

SERMON XII.

THE

LAST JUDGMENT.

ACTS xvii. 31.

Because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

TO know Jesus and him crucified was, to St. Paul, a matter of the utmost importance; and it can be no less important and necessary to have a true knowledge of God; this being the corner stone of religion, the chief motive and support of moral virtue.

To know God is not barely to know that he exists, but to conceive of him as a righteous and merciful, just and impartial, powerful and unchangeable Being: and not only to consent to these truths, but to give all his attributes their just weight and scope, and retrench them of nothing that is essentially in them.

To endeavour to reconcile an arbitrary and oppressive proceeding, with the attributes of justice and impartiality, is plainly to set the

divine nature and attributes at variance; it is to affirm that the Deity is all goodness within, though nothing but evil and malignity appear without; that God is merciful, kind and compassionate, though outwardly he is ill-natured, captious and contentious; assertions that combat with and destroy each other.

To treat our friends or fellow creatures with good words and good manners, is prudent and decent, since they have no way of judging of us but by our outward behaviour. But to what purpose do we make use of compliments and fine words to an omnicient Being, when, either for want of knowing what is implied in those words, or else, for want of giving them their full force and meaning, we throw the most glaring affront and palpable indignity upon him.

This was an error the Athenians, the wisest of Pagan nations, were infected with. They acscribed to God the attributes of wisdom, purity, and compassion; and, at the same time, their divine worship consisted in ceremonies so ridiculous, so impure, and so inhuman, that, instead of honouring the Deity, they tended to paint him in the most mean, despicable, and horrible light, such as (one would now think) had been the contrivance of premeditated malice in order to reproach and defame him.

In this state it was that St. Paul found the people of Athens, to whom this discourse, from whence my text is taken, was directed.

This city was a place of learning, liberty, and superstition; and, as the chapter informs us, curiosity; for we are told, that not only the Athenians themselves, but the strangers which were there, spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing; a disposition which it were to be wished had ended with themselves. But be that as it is, these people had been so bewildered with the variety and multiplicity of strange gods, which philosophers and magicians (taking advantage, no doubt, of their fickle and curious disposition) had introduced amongst them, had fixed, at last, upon some supreme Being whom they worshipped under the character of the unknown God. This, the Apostle observing, took occasion to make the same full discovery of this unknown God; the same display of his awful and amiable attributes, which had been communicated to himself at his miraculous conversion.

Ye men of Athens, says he, *I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription: To the unknown God. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands: neither is worshipped with mens hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life and breath, and all things.*

From this refined and spiritual description of the divine nature, the Apostle infers the folly

and absurdity of their pagan ceremonies and superstitions; and by way of conclusion, presses them to repentance by the powerful arguments in my text: *Because God hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance to all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.*

Many arguments have been drawn from reason to prove the certainty of this future judgment; but as all that hath been offered on that head, by the wisest of the ancient philosophers, was inclusive, amounting only to a moral probability, those who would endeavour to illustrate this truth must rely entirely upon scripture, the matter being capable of no other proof or evidence.

Indeed the whole mediatory undertaking of our blessed Saviour, and all the circumstances of it, are matter of pure revelation; 'tis the hidden and manifold wisdom of God, which none of the princes and philosophers of this world knew any thing of; and we should have known as little of it as they, had we been left to our own reason, and not blessed with a divine revelation. The enemies of revealed religion, indeed, ascribe our superior knowledge of the Deity and his divine truths to the proper cultivation and improvement of reason; though nothing is more arrogant, nothing more ungrateful, nothing more evident, than the contrary.

It cannot be denied, but that there were men of as great parts and learning in Rome and Athens, when in their meridian of splendor,

as in the dominions of any prince since those days. To what advantage then do we owe our superior light, unless it be to the publication of the gospel.

But not to confine our remarks to men of learning, for religion was not designed for such alone, but for the unlearned also: the common people of our time are taken up with their trades and occupation, and have as little leisure and abilities for study as the common people among the Romans and Athenians; and yet (as I observed to you just now) the Athenians were made up of folly, obscenity, and barbarity. But enquire now from the meanest mechanic, and he will tell you that there is a God that made heaven and earth; that this God is a wise, righteous, and compassionate God; and that an honest heart and a good conscience is the best recommendation to his favour.

Now I should be glad to know what it is that has opened the eyes of the world? What it is that has supplanted these notions so subversive of virtue and true piety, if the gospel has not done it? 'Till we find it attributed to some other cause, we may justly place it there; and therefore if the gospel of Christ has dispersed the erroneous and superstitious principles of heathenism, and introduced worthy and adequate conceptions of the Deity instead thereof, surely nothing but ingratitude, or the most abandoned and corrupt principles, can prevent our giving a due attendance to, and approbation of, its doctrines.

Let us now see what the scriptures say of this future account. And, for method's sake, we will divide this discourse into three heads. In the

First place, We will see what assurance the scriptures give us of a future judgment.

Secondly, Consider the proceedings of that day, together with the candour and equity of the Judge.

Thirdly, We will take notice of the rewards and punishments consequent thereupon. And

Fourthly, Of the day set apart for that purpose.

First, We are to see what assurance the scriptures give us of a future judgment.

Our blessed Saviour, when he was discoursing to his disciples of the end of the world, informed them that at that time *the Son of Man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of his Father.* Here our Redeemer is represented as the chief minister of God's justice, in the distribution of rewards to the righteous, and punishment to the wicked; and though the effect and execution of the sentence only be expressed, yet it supposes a judicious proceeding.

Thus likewise we read: *For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his holy angels, and then he shall reward every man according to his work.* Shall come in the glory

of his Father: *i. e.* with his authority committed to him.

Then again our Saviour, speaking of his coming to judge the world, expresses himself thus: *Then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; i. e.* in order to judge the world.

Our Saviour, in the next place, produces his commission, and tells us from whence his authority was derived to him: *The Father judgeth no man, but has committed all judgment to the Son, to whom he has given authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man.* St. Peter declares, that *God commanded the Apostles to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is Christ that is ordained to be the Judge of the quick and the dead.* And St. Paul, in the words of my text, declares that God *hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained,* (*i. e.* Jesus Christ) for it follows, *whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.*

In short, all St. Paul's Epistles are pregnant with threatenings and promises resulting from this future judgment. Thus he speaks to the Thessalonians: *The Lord Jesus Christ shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on all them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of his son, who shall be punished with everlasting damnation*

from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.

Thus we see what assurance we have of a future judgment. This is a doctrine that is the soul and spirit of religion; for what doth the notion or belief of a God signify, if he will not trouble himself to take notice how men behave themselves here? If he will neither reward nor punish, virtue is then but an empty name; a needless penance which men impose upon themselves; and the vicious and debauched are as safe and secure, as their lives seem easy and delightful.

But as there is a Judge who distinguishes the actions of men here, and will indeed judge the world hereafter, then those who have sense must know their interest; this awakens their consciences, assuring them that piety and virtue are absolutely necessary, and of the greatest importance to their souls hereafter. But this will appear more fully by considering, as was proposed,

Secondly, The proceedings of that day, together with the candour and equity of the Judge, for which we must also be beholding to the scripture; there we are told the world will be judged in righteousness.

In human tribunals there is a distinction between the courts of law and equity; but there are no different jndicatories in the other world; for there Mercy and Truth kiss each other; Law and Equity proceed from the same mouth, from the same throne; there will be no arbitrary proceedings; none will be ac-

quitted, none condemned, by a strain of prerogative, or any unjust measure in the Judge; no, he will govern himself by the justice and equity of the cause: this, he himself, hath declared. *All the churches*, says he, *shall know that I am he who searcheth the reins and the heart, and will render to every man according to his works.* And St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Corinthians, assures us that *we must all appear at the judgment seat of Christ, to answer for the things done in the flesh, whether they be good, or whether they be evil.*

At which time, though God does not expect from men the perfection of angels, nor to reap but in proportion to what he has sown; yet, by the improvement of those talents he hath afforded, he expects to find a difference in the attainment and temper of those he consigns to a different state for eternity. And, although, as St. Paul tells the Romans, *those that have sinned without law, shall perish without the law; and such as have sinned under the law, shall be judged by the law;* yet still the proceedings are just and equal, because they are according to men's deeds, and proportionable to their opportunities of doing good. If this were not so, that day could not be called a day of judgment, but rather a day of execution; and the whole transaction a demonstration of will and power, and not of righteousness and integrity. Besides, why is the Judge called a searcher of hearts? Why is he said to separate the sheep from the goats? Or why is he called a fiery trial, if he makes no discrimination, no difference, but

saves and damns by determination? No, we may rest assured that the Judge of all the earth will do right; he is capable of no fondness, partiality, or indulgence; will be wrought upon by no flattery, moved by no complaints, corrupted by no bribes.

This our Judge is acquitted of, every where in the holy scriptures; and particularly the Apostle St. Peter, who (by reason of his Jewish education) had formerly thought God Almighty had neglected and despised all nations but the Jews, proclaims with admiration, that *of a truth God is no respector of persons, but in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.* By which it is plain, that the great crisis of eternity depends upon a holy temper—upon a virtuous and pious life.

I have but one observation more to make upon this head, with respect to the righteous proceedings of the Judge, and that is, the candid interpretation he will put upon our actions. As no laws are tolerable when they are rigorously strained, and severely applied, so none are harsh and difficult that meet with a fair and equitable interpretation.

Now, in reference to this, the whole tenor of the gospel assures us, that our merciful God will watch no advantage against us; will not insist upon punctilios, but principally looks at the sincerity of our intentions, and will advance our good offices to as high a value as they are capable of. For thus he expresses himself, when speaking to those on his right hand: *Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom*

prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was an hungred and ye gave me meat, I was thirsty and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger and ye took me in, naked and ye cloathed me; I was sick and ye visited me; I was in prison and ye came unto me. And then, when the righteous (wondering at this divine goodness, and modestly under-valuing their own performances) shall answer, *Lord, when saw we thee an hungred and fed thee; thirsty and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger and took thee in; or naked and clothed thee? When saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?* The Judge graciously replies, *Verily I say unto you, in as much as ye have done it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*

Hence we see that our Saviour and Judge not only takes notice of the meanest offices, and the easiest expressions of charity and compassion, but remembers them for us when we have forgotten them: and that, at the most advantageous season, when he comes in all his glory with crowns and kingdoms to bestow, in the most important and critical time, when our eternity depends on it.

Our Judge will make such allowances that the justice of our cause will bear; he will not look upon defects in our duties as wilful contempts of his laws; nor will he deem our frailties and infirmities as presumptuous sins. *What!* (says he to Peter) *could you not watch with me for one hour? Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation.* And when he returned from praying, and found his disciples

still asleep, for their eyes were heavy, how graciously does he palliate this failing: *The spirit* (says he) *indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.* Hence it is plain, that such infirmities as are consistent with a divine life, with a sincere love of God, and a true and hearty sense of virtue and goodness, shall not be rigidly aggravated against us. I shall now, in the

Third place, Take notice of the rewards and punishments, which are the consequents of the proceedings of that day, and they will be proportioned to the calamities and sufferings of men in this life. St. Paul tells us, that *as one star differeth from another in glory, so also is the resurrection of the dead;* and our Saviour assures us, that *in his Father's house are many mansions:* not only room to receive many, but, as that phrase properly imports, several degrees and stations of glory; so that they who suffered most here, through poverty, sickness, or any other calamity, will be freed from their sorrows, and shine forth with an extraordinary ray of glory hereafter. Thus we see how the Almighty clears up and vindicates his providence.

As to the nature of these rewards and punishments, that is entirely conjectural; and whatever is offered as a particular description of them, is as much the product of fancy, as any of the flights that we meet with in the ancient poets. We are certain of nothing more than what is exhibited to us in scripture. The habitation of the virtuous is there represented by a city, a kingdom, a place of rest, a paradise;

all that can give us an idea of grandeur, delight, and happiness.

On the contrary, the dwelling of the wicked is described by unquenchable fire; a never dying worm; a bottomless pit; terms the most horrible and affrighting to human beings. And the manner how we shall become capable of receiving our merits, whether in the same bodies in which the deeds were done, or in such other bodies as God shall please to clothe our souls at the morning of the resurrection, though it has furnished matter of controversy amongst the learned in metaphysics, I look upon it to be a matter of indifference to us, since the soul will be equally capable of happiness or misery in any body that the Almighty shall give it. How body and spirit act reciprocally upon each other, and the manner by which their correspondence is supported in this life, never has, and I believe never will be, explained. How then shall we pretend to demonstrate the nature of their junction after separation?

St. Paul tells us, that *God shall change our vile bodies that they may be fashioned like unto his glorious body;* but wherein that likeness consists we are at a loss to determine; and as neither Christ nor his Apostles have thought proper to tell us, there is no necessity of placing the opinion of men (fallible as ourselves) in the Christian credenda. We see that God has promised to reward the virtuous, and punish the wicked, in another life; and we know God can and will do what he promises. Let us therefore be more careful to avoid the punishment than

to dive into the nature of it; such secret things belong unto the Lord our God. Leaving them then to the Divine wisdom, I pass on to the

Fourth and last thing proposed, namely, the day set apart for this disquisition.

The text tells us, that God hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world. No doubt of it; but as the day of Christ's first coming was immoveably fixed, so also is that of his second coming to judge the world; but Christ tells us, that *of that day or hour knoweth no man; no, not the angels of heaven, but my father only.* After a declaration so plain and so positive, modesty I think might prompt us to let the event of that promise ripen in the womb of futurity.

God, no doubt, thought proper to keep the world in ignorance as to the precise time; and two of his reasons (amongst many others best known to his infinite wisdom) may be these:

First, That he might keep the negligent world on their guard, who are too apt to put far from them that terrible day; and,

Secondly, To keep up the œconomy of life; for if the precise day was known beyond all uncertainty, and it so near our time that we could count the number of our days, and be certified how long we have to live, we should be like so many criminals, whose time of probation is fixed; and who, in consequence thereof, would spend our whole time in preparing for this important day, and neglect to provide the common necessaries of life, which (without the interposition of a miracle) would hasten the

period of the world, and frustrate the purpose of God.

To conclude. As Christianity gives us assurance of the resurrection of the body, which those who were instructed by reason only knew nothing at all of, and even has furnished us with a glorious instance of it in the resurrection of Christ; since the reward that Christianity proposes is worthy of God, an inheritance undefiled with misery or vice, a state in which we shall be fitted for the most exalted employments and pleasures; let us thankfully cherish this glorious hope, entertain it as the sum of all our wishes, the completion of all our joys.

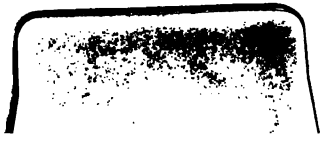
Of such vast moment was it to the wise St. Paul, that he *counted all things but loss and dung in comparison of this one thing, that he might, by any means, attain unto the resurrection of the dead*, unto an happy part in that resurrection. How earnestly did he *press toward the mark* (through all manner of afflictions, necessities, and distresses) *for the prize of the high calling of God, in Christ Jesus.* And what did not the old patriarchs gladly do? What did they not most willingly suffer that they might attain a better resurrection? And shall not the hope of this prompt us to make our peace with God, and by an effectual repentance abandon all the ways of sin for the future?

But if such examples be not sufficient to lead us to a preparation suitable to the importance of the trial, perhaps the thoughts of what must infallibly be the result of our petulent follies, wilful miscarriages, and treacherous infidelity,

may have some effect upon us. Let us then suppose ourselves just raised from the sleep of death by the arch-angel; imagine the trumpet sounding, and these awful words pronounced: Arise ye dead and come before the judgment seat of Christ; that we were now standing there to hear our past and forgotten sins called to remembrance; to see our most hidden and disguised actions rightly judged and rewarded; where is that hardened sinner that would not be covered with shame and confusion? Where is that abandoned sinner whose countenance would not change, whose conscience would not sting him with remorse, and whose guilty soul would not shudder at his approaching doom?

Let me exhort you, then, my brethren, to be always mindful of that awful scene; may you always remember, that however distant that day of general reckoning may be, yet with regard to individuals, it may be fixed to the day of departure out of this world; since after that there is no work, no device, no repentance; but as the tree falls so it will lay.

I shall therefore conclude all in the words of our blessed Saviour: *Watch ye, therefore, (for ye know not when the master of the house cometh; at even, or at midnight, or at the cock crowing, or in the morning) lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, watch.*

FINIS.

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